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Abstract

This project charts a rhetorical history of the New American Movement's (NAM) organizational debates on gay liberation and socialist feminism between 1970 and 1980. NAM was a socialist feminist organization active across the 1970s in the United States that sought to create a mass movement through a conception of a particularly "American Socialism." Through a periodization of NAM's archival history, I highlight how NAM members were able to work in coalition with a wide range of individuals and groups both within and outside of the organization to build a socialist feminist conception of gay liberation. Drawing on original archival research performed at four archives in the United States in collections of speeches, internal memos, personal and organizational correspondence, newsletters, and discussion notes, I argue that NAM's adoption of a socialist feminist approach to gay liberation augments "siloes" rhetorical approaches to social movements in the 1970s in as much as NAM members, as well as their theories and practice, worked out of, within, and with autonomous liberation movements. This project also intervenes in histories of gay liberation, feminism, and socialism in the 1970s by centering NAM's, largely unaddressed in scholarship, work which challenges the seemingly stable lines between each movement.

“A growing excitement that ‘something was happening’”:
A Rhetorical History of Gay Liberation and Socialist Feminism in the New American Movement
between 1970 and 1980

by

Chris DiCesare

B.A. Macalester College, 2015

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Communication & Rhetorical Studies

Syracuse University
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

1. The New American Movement, Queer Anti-Capitalism, and Rhetorical History 1

 Approaching NAM Today 8

 1970s Socialism, Gay Liberation & Feminism 15

 Chapter Layout 23

2. Leaders and Liberation: NAM between 1971 and 1972 28

 “A Way to Overcome the Mistakes of the Past” 29

 NAM’s Thanksgiving Conference: “A growing excitement that ‘something was happening’” 36

 Responses to Davenport: “A New Beginning”? 42

 Conclusion 51

3. Developing a (Lesbian) Socialist Feminism in NAM: 1972-1975 52

 Between Davenport and Minneapolis: A Perspective Taking Shape 55

 Linking Socialism & Feminism? 61

 Under Construction: NAM’s Socialist Feminism in Minneapolis 66

 Thanksgiving 1972 73

 From the Personal is Political to the Political is Personal: Lesbianism & Socialist Feminism 75

 After the Conference 82

 Laying the ground for a 1975 National Socialist Feminist Conference 84

 1975 National Socialist/Feminist Conference 87

 Conclusion 92

4. Gay Liberation in NAM: 1975-1980 94

 Drawing Lines: NAM, Marxist-Leninism, and Democratic Socialism 95

 NAM’s 4th Annual Convention, Oberlin, OH, 1975 97

 NAM’s Women’s Caucus 99

 NAM’s Androgyny Caucus 102

 NAM’s Gay Men’s Caucus 103

 Convention Aftermath 108

 Let’s Kill Ozzie and Harriet 113

 NAM’s 5th Annual Convention, Cedar Rapids, IA, 1976 118

 NAM’s 6th Annual Convention, Cedar Rapids, IA, 1977 123

 Blazing Star 126

NAM's 7 th Annual Convention, Milwaukee, WI, 1978.....	129
NAM's 8 th & 9 th Annual Conventions, 1979-1980	134
NAM's New Working Papers, 1978-1979	139
Conclusion	147
5. Epilogue.....	149
Summary	150
Possibilities	151
Bibliography	156
Vita.....	162

Introduction

The New American Movement, Queer Anti-Capitalism, and Rhetorical History

“[B]eing a homosexual in most tight-ass macho Movement circles is usually a drag”¹ -Brian J.

Coyle

In June of 1971, Brian J. Coyle, a former Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) member active in the anti-war and student movements in the 1960s, published a coming out article in *Hundred Flowers*, an underground newspaper based in the Twin Cities. I begin with Coyle for two reasons, first, his writing, contained in a personal collection at the Minnesota Historical Society, was one of my first interactions with intermeshing histories of gay liberation and socialist groups while I was an undergraduate in the Twin Cities, two movements that I had otherwise understood as incompatible in the 1970s. Second, Coyle’s work and writing frame many of the central perspectives and ideas that this project engages. And further, over the next year, Coyle would become the first national office coordinator of the New American Movement (NAM), which was headquartered in Minneapolis at the time, and would push for the inclusion of gay liberation in NAM’s platform from its inception.

NAM was a socialist feminist organization active in the United States throughout the 1970s. They grew out of New Left social movements and in particular, the collapse of SDS. NAM centrally concerned itself with creating an “American socialism,” one that engaged both socialist thought and autonomous liberation movements. They were also heavily involved in

¹ “The First in a Series of True Confessions by a Flaming Faggot,” Box 1, Coming Out Articles June 25, July 22 1971 Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

anti-war protests, their acronym references the war in Vietnam, environmental issues, clerical worker organizing, and reducing costs for, and increasing access to, daycare services.²

As a socialist organization that sought to center feminist and gay liberationist theories and practices, in relation to radical economic positions, NAM appears as an outlier in relation to other socialist groups at the time and prior to the 1970s. Many other socialist groups, as Coyle's narrative indicates, refused to address gay liberation, at best, as anything more than a "mere adjunct" to socialism, and at worst, responding to gay liberation with openly homophobic positions. This project offers a rhetorical history of NAM's work on gay liberation within a mixed socialist feminist organization. It seeks to elucidate, in both rhetorical scholarship and academic scholarship more generally, an otherwise unaddressed moment of anti-capitalist organizing that linked gay liberation and socialist feminism by focusing predominantly on the internal debates of NAM members.

Coyle's first article in *Hundred Flowers*, titled "The First in a Series of True Confessions by a Flaming Faggot!" was published in June of 1971 under the pseudonym "Shannon."³ Coyle follows this first essay in July with an essay titled "Heterosexism in our 'Hip' Community" where he specifically names himself after noting that a local cop, also named Shannon, and an acquaintance felt his original article was a smear against them. As Coyle jokes, "wouldn't you know? My Irish luck to pick a pig's name for a pseudonym."⁴ Where Coyle's first essay reviews his experiences coming out and finding love, his second points directly at the failures of anti-

² Victor Cohen, "Recollecting The New American Movement: An Introduction," in *The New American Movement: An Oral History*, ed. Victor Cohen (Indiana, Pa.: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

³ "The First," Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴ "Heterosexism in our 'Hip' Community," Box 1, Coming Out Articles June 25, July 22 1971 Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

war and supposedly revolutionary male leaders to confront their own homophobia in their organizing. The failure of male leadership in New Left movements to address sexuality in their organizing speaks both to the importance of gay and lesbian narratives in this moment and to the impetus for this project, to bring to light some of the many gay and lesbian activists who, in the face of organizational homophobia, continued to assert the need for linking gay liberation, feminism, and socialism.

In the same months that Coyle was publishing on being gay in movement circles, Michael Lerner had begun to circulate his conceptualizing and organizing document “The New American Movement: A Way to Overcome the Mistakes of the Past,” also referred to as “The June Document” for the nascent NAM. Lerner, a former SDS activist known nationally as a result of his membership in the Seattle Liberation Front and who was prosecuted in late 1970 as one of the “Seattle 7” that were arrested for “inciting riots.” The “Seattle 7” proceeded to incite disorder in federal court during a trial that would eventually end in a “mistrial by reason of misconduct of the defendants and, to some extent, their counsel in failing to assist the court in the matter of procuring an orderly trial and in the matter of bringing the defendants into the court.”⁵

In Coyle’s first *Hundred Flowers* essay, he details the fear and excitement he experienced coming of age in the 1960s as a closeted gay man. In college, at a time when there was “nothing like Gay Lib on campus,” Coyle discusses fleeting and extended loving admiration for his roommates. He discusses one of his early unreciprocated love interests returning from

⁵ Kit Bakke, “The Chaos, and Surprising Conclusion, of the 1970 Trial of the Seattle 7,” *The Seattle Times*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/protest-on-trial-chronicles-the-chaos-and-the-surprising-conclusion-of-the-1970-trial-of-the-seattle-7/>.

medical school noting, “He took me aside with great authority, told me that I had ‘definite homosexual tendencies’. Then he asked if I knew it and wanted help. From him? That bastard. I felt betrayed and wanted to kick that Great White Doctor in the balls.”⁶

Later, Coyle discusses a flourishing romance with another roommate, Lee. He describes their sensual interactions noting that “For a brief time, I was lucky enough to have someone to rap approvingly [with] about being gay.” Yet, Coyle points out that this love was stymied because “we feared the reaction of our Movement friends.” As Coyle describes it,

Lee got into the Trotskyist movement in a big way and suppressed his gay feelings. I guess letting his homosexuality come out again would conflict with his political ambitions. (Until recently, the Trots and other such sectarian groups forbade gay people to bring their ‘personal problems’ into their ‘revolutionary activities.’) Now that the SWP-YSA has opportunistically provided for a ‘minority gay caucus’ within its ranks, maybe Lee has come out again. I don’t know, but being a homosexual in most tight-ass macho Movement circles is usually a drag.⁷

Here, a number of issues central to this project come to light. First, Coyle centers how his political and social circles, made up of “movement types,” often students and young anti-war activists and intellectuals, were and remained overtly homophobic even as they preached transgression and actively denied other social norms. In his second essay Coyle points out that “freaks may think of themselves as ‘living outside the law,’ free of straight society’s roles and regulations,” as I believe can be seen in the scene Lerner and the Seattle 7 made in court, “but they usually adhere just as strongly as their parents to archaic beliefs in ‘Natural Law.’” This notion of archaic Natural Law, for Coyle, is based in an Aristotelian notion of “natural instincts” which in the 1970s took the form of seeing homosexuality as a perversion, a perspective he ties

⁶ “The First,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁷ Ibid.

directly to “such Marxist-Leninists (especially the CP [Communist Party], PL [Progressive Labor Party] and now Cuba’s leadership)—all alleged ‘scientific materialists—have their arguments on concepts like Aristotle’s theory of Natural law... They won’t listen to Gay socialists...”⁸ For Coyle, it was impossible to be both a part of these anti-war groups and be openly gay and yet, as Coyle expands on in his second essay, he sees no way to attain social and political liberation apart from these movement members.

Coyle’s approach, as I address later in this introduction, also challenges some of the central tenets, while aligning with others, forwarded by early gay liberation works like Carl Wittman’s 1969 text, “Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto.” After describing the specific experiences of gay men in the United States Wittman argues, “Right now the bulk of our work has to be among ourselves-self education, fending off attacks, and building free territory. Thus basically we have to have a gay/straight vision of the world until the oppression of gays is ended.” He further argues, specifically referencing “white radicals and ideologues,” that “because radicals are doing somebody else’s thing they tend to avoid issues which affect them directly, and see us as jeopardizing their ‘work’ with other groups.”⁹ Here, Wittman furthers the importance for predominantly, and for the time being exclusively, autonomous gay (male) organizing. In contrast, Coyle does not lay claim to separation, and argues that it cannot be enough alone. Rather, he demands that gay liberation be included in the root of a radical socialist approach.

⁸ “Heterosexism,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁹ Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” 1970, PE.036, Box 84, Red Butterfly Folder, Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Coyle identifies “phallic imperialism” as that which is enforced by those in power in the United States, and what must be “smashed” in order to attain liberation. In describing his experiences being silenced and avoided by straight men at anti-war meetings, “as though [m]’acho’ has nothing to do with racist, imperialist wars.” He also argues instead that “We don’t just desire ‘Peace Now’: We want the Vietnamese people to win. We are trying to practice inter-communalism: Blacks, Browns, Yellows, Reds, Women, Working people, Youth, and Gays—each community organizing its own, educating each other to the special oppression of each community so we stop oppressing each other, and start supporting each other in the larger struggle against the few Rich Straight White Men that rule America and most of the world.”

In his second essay, he also addresses how the rise of “sexual politics” has shaped movement members. He notes,

Although our ‘new’ generation cultivates a funky kind of sophistication and tolerance (‘different strokes for different folks’—‘live & let live’), homosexuality threatens even the heaviest Movement macho. After all, they’ve been channeled and programmed by straight America to be ‘masculine’, to have ‘purpose’: to protect, to provide and to procreate. And even the ‘love’ generation which thinks it has rejected these straight purposes often treats women paternalistically and relates to love as though it is a psychic commodity. When we say we love someone, what we often mean is that we want to possess them.¹⁰

The political project Coyle advances here is one that ties sexuality directly to the logics of capitalism. Implicating not only straight men but also himself, he argues that under capitalism, love is commodified. This argument would become the basis of his investments in gay liberation within NAM.

¹⁰ “Heterosexism,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

Second, Coyle specifically identifies the opportunism and homophobia of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its youth organization, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). The SWP is a reoccurring figure throughout NAM's organizational history offering for some a foil to NAM's work, and for others a closely related ally. Clearly in Coyle's telling, the SWP is seen as "opportunistically" opening itself to out gay members and as the SWP's actions over the next three years would show, Coyle's points were proved correct. And, Coyle's discussion of gay people being accused of having "personal problems" by socialist leaders shapes much of how gay liberationist ideas interacted with socialist organizations. In his second essay, he argues that there is both overt and implicit anti-gay and lesbian bias in movement circles, writing that "it's impossible for [macho men] to conceive of a woman who doesn't derive her identity from relating to men." He specifically addresses the homophobia of the 3rd Venceremos Brigade, which failed to denounce the homophobic stances of the Cuban government, and the organizers apparently made efforts to weed out any homosexuals who were seeking to join their trip to Cuba.¹¹

Coyle concludes his first essay with a discussion of how being out has allowed him to "find the reactions of people much less painful." He also notes that "The only people (besides Gay brothers) who really seem to appreciate our 'coming out' are the sisters—liberated women—who talk openly about sex, take it well & understand."¹² While this support is essential to Coyle's larger arguments about the particular issues "tight-ass" men in "Movement circles" pose for gay men, and thus a larger revolutionary movement, many women, and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "The First," Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

especially lesbian women, criticized the continuing misogyny and lacking solidarity they experienced from gay and straight men alike both within and without the movement. Indeed, this question of “the movement” itself is a recurring question NAM grappled with as the movement was frequently juxtaposed with “industrial workers” or, as was the case for many socialist organizations, simply “the workers.” For NAM, these questions came from their leadership’s primary involvement in New Left circles of students and intellectuals rather than with US industrial laborers. He concludes his second essay affirming the possibility of inter-communalism, “Sooner or later, we will be more together because our basic battle is the same. But in the meantime, we Gay people have many questions to ask of anyone who claims to be our comrade in struggle. *Will you begin to answer them? Keep Coming... Shannon.*”¹³ I believe that NAM took up Coyle’s provocation and it is this investment in inter-communalism that I seek to elucidate in this project.

Approaching NAM Today

NAM’s investments in inter-communalism in their present also speak to one of my desires for their past. I came across the personal papers of Brian J. Coyle, a Twin Cities politician remembered as the first openly gay city council member in Minneapolis history, at the Minnesota Historical Society as part of an effort to complete an undergraduate paper. Entering the marble rotunda of the Minnesota History Center in Saint Paul, thinking I would be writing on a history of gay and lesbian student organizing at universities, what I found in Coyle’s boxes was the remarkably queer life of a former SDS and New American Movement (NAM) member as well as a leftist organizer, in a collection otherwise dedicated to the work of a gay politician

¹³ Heterosexism,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

who championed neoliberal policies focused on gay moralism, such as same-sex marriage and the closure of bathhouses in Minneapolis. I began to understand anew my desire for a queer 1970s history through Elizabeth Freeman's notion of queer "belonging" that is, an effort in "attaching to larger structures and thus belonging, and of acquiring and passing on dispositions over time and thereby 'being long.'"¹⁴ Through this framework, I found a personal context to understand my connection to individuals like Coyle living in worlds seemingly so far away temporally but so close spatially.

Coyle's papers, including the two articles I have just discussed, gave me my first sense of the power of history to inform actions in the present, at a moment when I was confronting experiences of homophobia and transphobia in my life and work. While I did not have the words then, I can now narrate these experiences in terms of my own becoming "archival queer"¹⁵ at a moment when I was both coming into queerness and I would learn, "being long." For me, this project, and engaging with the papers of NAM, similarly offers an opportunity to "feel historical," that is, to address not only my own desires for a queer history but also to address the dialectical relationship between the past and the present.¹⁶ And further, to challenge the seemingly stable ground of history in order to intervene in the present, as I seek to do in the epilogue of this project. Like NAM's work, I hope that this project can speak to audiences inside and outside of the academy. NAM's work raises and addresses necessary questions about coalitional work, anti-capitalist organizing around sexuality, and practices

¹⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), 310.

¹⁵ Charles E. Morris, "Archival Queer," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 145–51.

¹⁶ Christopher S. Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

seeking to not just theorize but “do” socialist feminism inside and outside of an organization. In seeking to narrate a rhetorical history out of NAM’s archive, this project does not do full justice to the possibilities I see in NAM’s history. As I lay out in my conclusion, there are numerous paths through NAM’s archive that this project only partially considers. Some likely fruitful paths not taken include the ways NAM’s archive can augment both archival and historiographical theories and practices. That said, in choosing to perform a rhetorical history, this project seeks to intimately address the shifts and rifts in NAM’s discussions and debates on gay liberation and socialist feminism which, as I consider in the next section, challenge contemporary meta-narratives of 1970s social movements.

Continuing in the present, 2018 saw the republication of Mario Mieli’s 1977 text *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*. The text was originally published in an abridged English version as *Homosexuality and Liberation* in 1980.¹⁷ Its republication is important to this project for two reasons. First, its existence shows that there were a number of gay and socialist groups, beyond NAM, interested in approaching gay liberation through socialist thought across Europe in the 1970s, a point often left unaddressed in contemporary scholarship. The question was similarly circulating in Spain and the UK with *Vindication Feminista* in Spain and the work of the Gay Left Collective in the UK. And second, it is an example of the contemporary return to both the 1970s and to questions of sexuality and socialism.

¹⁷ Tim Dean, “Foreword,” in *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*, 1st ed., Book (GB: Pluto Press, 2018), vi.

This example and other work from the last ten years also suggest that questions of both history and socialist theories of sexuality have returned as important sites of theorization. For example, theorists and historians such as, Kevin Floyd, Holly Lewis, Peter Drucker, Emily K. Hobson, Alan Sears, and Roderick Ferguson have all published books and numerous articles on this topic.¹⁸ Many of these scholars' work have intimately shaped how I approach NAM's history, and as I discuss in my epilogue, I believe NAM's work offers insight into these contemporary discussions as well.

NAM's discussions on gay liberation's relationship to socialism are the focus of my project. While I do engage the work of other groups who have considered gay liberation and socialism, I have yet to come across such extended conversations from these organizations. That is, NAM is central to my project because they have substantial records that are held in the states I have had access to archives in, Minnesota and New York. Importantly, this project draws on an extant archive that is closely linked to two states where I have lived.

The objects I draw on in this project span what could be called the long 70s. The earliest documents I draw on from future NAM members begin in months after Stonewall, towards the end of 1969. They continue throughout the 70s concluding in the early 1980s. These documents are the result of archival research performed predominantly at four archives with a range of goals. These archives include the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and

¹⁸ These scholars represent a sample of recent work linking sexuality, and in some cases anti-racism, to socialist theory and history: Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody* (Zed Books, 2016); Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism*, Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 92 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2015); Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Alan Sears, "Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?," *Science & Society; New York* 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 92–112; and Roderick A. Ferguson, *One-Dimensional Queer* (Medford, MA; Polity Press, 2018).

Transgender Studies at the University of Minnesota, the Human Sexuality Collection at Cornell University, the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, and the Manuscripts collection at the Minnesota Historical Society. Despite the disparate missions and holdings of each of the archives I have visited, all of the collections contained documents specifically related to meetings of socialist and gay liberationist members and movements in the 1970s. Further, each holds papers relevant to the central organization for this project, NAM. These collections span from 1969 through 1981, nearly the entirety of NAM's independent existence. I also draw on documents from every NAM convention as well as individual chapter reports and personal correspondence that address links between NAM and gay liberation.

In this sense, my project is necessarily partial. Not only is NAM's work held in multiple other archives in the United States, ones I hope to visit soon, but also many NAM members are still alive and organizing today around the same issues my thesis addresses. While I have spoken to a few former members informally, a missing piece of this project, one that is the result of my limited time to pursue this project, is the animated voices and living legacies of former members in the present, voices that I hope to centrally include in future iterations of this project.

Although there have been some texts centrally focused on the work and place of NAM in history, NAM is more often cited in passing through footnotes, as in Lise Vogel's landmark 1983 work, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* where the organization is identified as a "socialist-feminist group." Additionally, former NAM members Harry Boyte and Sara Evans both have written about NAM in their respective texts but significantly, NAM's work on gay

liberation as an integral part of socialist theorizing has never been directly addressed by scholars within or outside of rhetoric.

NAM's organizational efforts to read out of and into interrelated autonomous movements challenges rhetorical scholarship that Christina R. Foust identifies as "siloing" where the scholarship "isolates its contribution to particular cases,"¹⁹ such as the case of the women's movement. As NAM, a mixed socialist feminist organization, sits at the intersection of the autonomous women's movement, the gay liberation movement, and socialist or anti-capitalist movements, their work resists reduction to one particular case.

I argue that NAM's organizational work is relevant to rhetorical approaches to both women's movement literature in the 1970s, through their investments in a mixed organization, and to the function of gay liberationist rhetoric in the same period. Following Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, this project is predominantly concerned with internal audiences in NAM. As Morris and Browne argue, "the success of any movement depends on the solidarity of its members... Creating and maintaining that solidarity may be the most pressing challenge that movements confront."²⁰ As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell begins her landmark 1973 essay, "Whatever the phrase 'women's liberation' means, it cannot as yet, be used to refer to a cohesive political movement. No clearly defined program or set of policies unifies the small, frequently transitory groups that compose it, nor is there

¹⁹ Christina R. Foust, "'Social Movement Rhetoric' A Critical Genealogy, Post-1980," in *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics*, ed. Amy Pason, Kate Zittlow Rogness, and Christina R. Foust, Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2017), 55.

²⁰ Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne, eds., *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, 3rd edition (State College, Pennsylvania: Strata Pub Co, 2013), 293.

much evidence of organizational unity and cooperation.”²¹ One of NAM’s central goals, following Campbell’s “as yet,” was to unify and work across a number of the insights of New Left organizations towards a mass organization. Then, in line with Morris & Browne as well as Campbell’s analysis, this project is predominantly concerned with how the terms of a collective sense of solidarity shifted over NAM’s existence. Each chapter in this project points to the rhetorical constitution of solidarity in NAM through internal debates that forged collective visions and commitments among its members. Additionally, the rest of this section introduces NAM’s political work through rhetorical history. As I have noted, NAM has found no place in social movement rhetorics and exists in academic scholarship predominantly by way of passing reference in histories of 1970s social movements.

I believe this rhetorical history should be understood as working between four interrelated movements of the 1970s, all of which have been taken up independently and to some extent, in relation to each other. These are: the women’s movement, which include liberal feminist groups such as The National Organization for Women (NOW), lesbian feminist groups such as The Furies or The Radicalesbians; the autonomous gay liberation movement, which includes groups such as the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance; Old Left groups, particularly centering labor organizing, such as the Communist Party U.S.A.; finally, New Left organizations such as the New American Movement, anti-war organizations, and offshoots of Students for a Democratic Society.

²¹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59, no. 1 (February 1, 1973): 74.

While these four movements have been independently written about as histories, my project seeks to answer the following questions: What role did NAM play in gay liberation movements in the 1970s? What were the stakes of socialist feminist organizational debates on gay liberation? How did gay liberation rhetoric shift NAM's agendas and actions? And most significantly, how do NAM's theorizations of sexuality in socialism fit into and/or complicate contemporary understandings of gay liberation, feminism, and socialism in the 1970s? For the remainder of this introduction, I begin by briefly considering previous scholarship on feminism, gay liberation and New Left and Old Left socialism in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, I lay out the three main chapters of this thesis.

1970s Socialism, Gay Liberation & Feminism

I argue here that NAM's relationship to lesbianism, socialism, and feminism complicates much of contemporary writing on social movements in the 1970s. I also offer provisional definitions of each term that I will follow and complicate in this project.

First, I want to contextualize the work of NAM within a larger New Left movement. Historians and contemporaries of the New Left generally mark its beginning in the middle and late 1950s in the United States, with a particular explosion of activity in the middle of the 1960s. Prior to the rise of the New Left, Jeffrey Coker argues that the Old Left faced a period of fragmentation in the late 1940s along the lines of feeling "disillusioned with Marxism" and "an agreement that the idea of a revolutionary working class made little sense" as workers gained

prosperity post-World War II and the Democratic Party gained the support of capitalism-invested and explicitly anti-communist labor unions.²²

Writing in 1969, Staughton Lynd, a labor organizer who would become an early NAM member and advocate over the next 2 years, argues that the New Left can be marked by the rise of student movement, in organizations such as SDS in 1960 and anti-racist activism such as the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. Lynd defines the New Left in the United States as part of an “international political tendency” that shared the common concerns of the “rejection both of capitalism and of the bureaucratic Communism exemplified by the Soviet Union; anti-imperialism; and an orientation to decentralized ‘direct action,’ violent or nonviolent.”²³ Further, Lynd, following Carl Oglesby, a former president of SDS, argues that “The white New Left discovered corporate liberalism not only in the oppression of American blacks and Vietnamese guerrillas, but in their own lives as well.”²⁴ That is, the New Left aligned with the work of continental scholars such as Herbert Marcuse that brought social institutions into focus as a source of oppression and control.²⁵

Within this frame, Lynd addresses tensions that eventually arose within hallmark New Left groups like SDS, “Decision making by consensus gave way to caucusing, factional polemics, and voting.”²⁶ As I discuss further in my first chapter, and as Staughton Lynd would see first-hand in NAM, these tensions between various United States iterations of “the Left” came to a

²² Jeffrey W. Coker, *Confronting American Labor: The New Left Dilemma* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 14.

²³ Staughton Lynd, “Towards a History of the New Left,” in *The New Left: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Priscilla Long (Boston: P. Sargent, 1969), 2.

²⁴ Lynd, 9.

²⁵ Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* has been frequently cited as an important work for 1970s gay liberation movements. See for e.g. Floyd, *Reification of Desire*.

²⁶ Lynd, 11.

head at NAM's founding convention. Yet, these tensions, "Mistakes of the Past," were exactly what Michael Lerner sought to avoid in creating NAM.

Also held under the banner of the New Left are the women's movements and gay liberation in the late 1960s. Many scholars approach women's liberation movements in terms of liberal, radical, and socialist wings, with some recognition that lesbian feminism functioned predominantly within the radical segment of women's liberation. Other scholars choose not to typify the organizations they address and rather directly address specific objects from women's liberation movements. This appears particularly in scholarship on "consciousness raising," likely in part because rhetorics of consciousness raising appear frequently in contemporary scholarship of 1970s feminisms.²⁷

Following scholars that do typify feminisms in their work, I begin with Kristan Poirot's article, "Domesticating the Liberated Woman." In her essay, Poirot uses "radical/lesbian feminism" throughout her essay and without clarification of this conflation's meaning or implications.²⁸ Similarly, lesbian (separatist) feminism is often theorized independently or simply against liberal feminist organizations such as NOW.²⁹ In this vein, Katherine Kurs and Robert S. Cathcart argued in 1983 that "little has been done to analyze lesbian-feminist rhetoric as a significant agonistic ritual within the feminist movement—a rhetorical ritual that produces

²⁷ For rhetorical scholarship on feminist consciousness raising, see Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Consciousness-raising: Linking Theory, Criticism, and Practice," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 45–64; Jean Bessette, "An Archive of Anecdotes: Raising Lesbian Consciousness after the Daughters of Bilitis," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 22–45; and Tasha N. Dubriwny, "Consciousness-Raising as Collective Rhetoric: The Articulation of Experience in the Redstockings' Abortion Speak-Out of 1969," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 4 (November 1, 2005): 395–422.

²⁸ Kristan Poirot, "Domesticating the Liberated Woman: Containment Rhetorics of Second Wave Radical/Lesbian Feminism," *Women's Studies in Communication* 32, no. 3 (October 1, 2009): 264.

²⁹ See Samek's article for a similar definition of lesbian feminism. Alyssa A. Samek, "Violence and Identity Politics: 1970s Lesbian-Feminist Discourse and Robin Morgan's 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference Keynote Address," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 13, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 232–49.

confrontation not only within the system but with other forces in the movement.”³⁰ It is worth addressing here that “siloeing” also works to reify the categories it produces, in this case the lines between various feminisms in the 1970s. In this view, NOW is seen as particularly distant from a revolutionary socialist project. But, as I discuss in chapter 2, at least two NAM chapters sought to build, and in one case found, local NOW chapters to augment their work within NAM.

And, as Alice Echols describes in *Daring to Be Bad* there were substantial divides between feminists on the terms of “politicos,” “radical feminists” and “cultural feminists.”³¹ I follow Echols’ distinctions in this project. She notes,

Indeed, most early women's liberation groups were dominated by "politicos" who attributed women's oppression to capitalism, whose primary loyalty was to the left, and who longed for the imprimatur of the "invisible audience" of male leftists. "Feminists," or radical feminists, who opposed the subordination of women's liberation to the left and for whom male supremacy was not a mere epiphenomenon of capitalism, were an embattled minority in the movement's infancy.³²

As my engagement with Coyle’s early writings shows, many of NAM’s early members would be considered “politicos” and yet, as I argue in my first chapter, NAM’s efforts to engage feminism suggest that they were speaking beyond an “invisible audience” and sought to shift the grounds of socialist organizing to a perspective that deeply integrated socialist feminism into their perspective rather than allow it to stay as “mere epiphenomenon of capitalism.” Continuing to follow Echols, she argues that

Radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class, that relations between women and men needed to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction... Radical feminists articulated the earliest and most provocative critiques of the family, marriage, love, normative heterosexuality, and rape.

³⁰ Katherine Kurs and Robert S. Cathcart, “The Feminist Movement: Lesbian-Feminism as Confrontation,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 1983): 13.

³¹ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, American Culture 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 86.

³² Echols, 3.

They fought for safe, effective, accessible contraception; the repeal of all abortion laws; the creation of high-quality, community-controlled child-care centers; and an end to the media's objectification of women.³³

As I show in my second chapter, NAM was centrally concerned with many of the same projects Echols attributes to radical feminists, yet they did this on terms that did not reduce feminism to a “mere adjunct” to socialist thought and that did not suggest that they were a vanguard party who had the only authority to speak on “the real revolution.” Thus, in line with Kyra Pearson’s “Mapping Rhetorical Interventions in ‘National’ Feminist Histories,” where she reads the *Ain’t I A Woman* newspaper as a challenge to meta-histories of feminism, I am arguing that NAM’s work, “proves to be a peculiar site for feminism, whose complex rhetorical practices demand that the map of second wave feminism be transformed.”³⁴

Similarly, scholars approach gay liberation in terms of gay separatism or lesbian separatism. Importantly here, lesbian movements are often left unaddressed in gay liberation discussions, with attention often being directed at specifically the role of (white) gay men. As is the case in Jim Downs’ *Stand By Me* and James Darsey’s article, “From Gay is Good to the scourge of AIDS.”³⁵ Additionally, many scholars of gay liberation tend to focus on their distance from later queer social movements of the late 80s and 90s. As R. Antony Slagle argues in his article on Queer Nation, “In short, while the liberation movement has tended to strive for assimilation within the mainstream... while the liberation movements have constructed, although unintentionally, a unitary identity, the queer movements consciously have avoided

³³ Echols, 3-4.

³⁴ Kyra Pearson, “Mapping Rhetorical Interventions in ‘National’ Feminist Histories: Second Wave Feminism and *Ain’t I a Woman*,” *Communication Studies* 50, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): 160.

³⁵ Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation*, Book, Whole (New York: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016); James Darsey, “From ‘Gay Is Good’ to the Scourge of AIDS: The Evolution of Gay Liberation Rhetoric, 1977-1990,” *Communication Studies* 42, no. 1 (March 1, 1991): 43–66.

imposing an essentializing identity upon members in the movement.”³⁶ As I will further explore, NAM’s work shows that this general perspective of gay liberation as assimilationist must be further refined because as it stands, it cannot make space for the work of NAM members. Further, I argue across this project that NAM’s work has a number of resonances with and in some ways prefigures later queer coalitional struggles.

Similarly, Alan Sears notes in his article “Queer Anti-Capitalism,” that “Gay libertarian politics were so enthusiastic about erotic liberation that they tended to ignore the relations of power within sexuality and gender.”³⁷ My sense here is that Sears seeks to address particularly the work of segments of the Gay Liberation Front and other well-known groups predominated by gay men, as John D’Emilio had affirmed, “Frustrated and angered by the chauvinism they experienced in gay groups and the hostility they found in the women’s movement, many lesbians opted to create their own separatist organizations.”³⁸ But in contrast, although certainly not at all times by all members, as I discuss in my next chapters, NAM clearly placed substantial weight on power relations as a socialist feminist organization.

Within this context, I am interested in returning to the historical definition of “sexual politics” offered by Kate Millett in her landmark 1969 book *Sexual Politics*. As my discussion of Brian Coyle shows, he clearly embraced a notion of “sexual politics” that was broader than the historical literature on gay liberation seems to argue for. Millett argues that “a sexual revolution would require, perhaps first of all, an end of traditional sexual inhibitions and

³⁶ R. Anthony Slagle, “In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference,” *Western Journal of Communication* 59, no. 2 (June 1, 1995): 85–102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319509374510>.

³⁷ Alan Sears, “Queer Anti-Capitalism: What’s Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?,” *Science & Society; New York* 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 97-98.

³⁸ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 236.

taboos... The goal of sexual revolution would be a permissive single standard of sexual freedom, and one uncorrupted by the crass and exploitative economic bases of traditional sexual alliances.”³⁹ For Millett and NAM more generally, in theorizing a class-based understanding of sex and sexuality, we can see a turn away from traditional socialist efforts to engage women.

Scholars approaching socialist feminism in the 1970s tend to theorize it within a socialist tradition, addressing a renewed approach to “the woman question,” while maintaining an opposition to both the liberal and radical movements of women’s liberation. This mirrors Vogel’s footnote mention of NAM, that I addressed previously, “socialist feminism is not, moreover, the exclusive province of women.”⁴⁰ But, NAM’s work theorizing across socialist feminism and gay and lesbian sexuality challenges these divisions, in line with Millett’s explication of sexual politics. The major recent exception to this historical work is Emily K. Hobson’s *Lavender and Red* which specifically focuses on gay and lesbian solidarity on the West Coast in the 1970s, although it predominantly addresses political coalitions as historical moments, not specific theorizations of gay liberation and socialism. That said, Hobson’s work intimately addresses anti-racist, feminist, anti-imperialist, and gay liberationist collational efforts in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴¹

While I will continue to use “gay liberation” in this project to refer specifically to those perspectives that came out of groups such as the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activists Alliance, and The Radicalesbians, I believe the more capacious understanding of sexual politics

³⁹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1970), 62.

⁴⁰ Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Brill, 2013), 1.

⁴¹ I was both thrilled and dismayed to see Hobson’s book in 2016, three years after I had come across Brian Coyle’s work. I was thrilled because she beautifully narrates anti-capitalist and gay liberationist coalitional struggles and dismayed because I had the excellent title “Lavender and Red” in mind as a way to represent NAM’s work.

forwarded by Coyle and others in NAM is essential to their efforts to organize on a broad range of political issues through a socialist perspective intimately concerned with the experiences of many oppressed groups in the United States. It is worth noting as well that one gap within my project is a central focus on anti-racist organizing in NAM. This project predominantly considers NAM's anti-racist work when it was articulated in relation to socialist feminism or gay liberation. As I discuss in the next section, NAM faced criticisms for their lacking engagement on anti-racist issues but also played an important role on other anti-racist coalitions. As I discuss in more depth in chapter two, NAM faced criticisms from Third World socialist feminists for failing to thoroughly engage race as part of the 1975 National Socialist Feminist Conference. Additionally, in chapter three, I write on NAM's role in the July 4th Coalition, predominantly made up of anti-imperialist groups in response to the coming United States Bicentennial in 1976. While predominantly existing as a trace in some of the papers I have had access to, NAM also worked with the Black Panther Party, particularly in the Bay Area, and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party.

As I have indicated in this introduction, and seek to expand on in each coming chapter, NAM's archive offers a rich resource for approaching the possibilities and pitfalls of coalitional anti-capitalist struggle in the 1970s. NAM's internal discussions that have been preserved in archives illuminate how the organization was able to mobilize and engage activists, particularly socialist feminist gays and lesbians here, both within NAM and within autonomous organizations, from across the country towards a united goal of creating a truly democratic "American Socialism." The chapters of this project represent a periodization of discussions on gay liberation and socialist feminism from each year of NAM's existence, following a wide range

of members who were involved in NAM's theorizing and actions both on gay liberation and alongside a radical economic agenda. In this context, NAM's work offers little for the historical approach generally associated with gay and lesbian studies in which the researcher seeks to find a place for "monumental" queers (gays and lesbians) within the historical record.⁴² That is, the work of NAM was not completed by a few key individuals worth remembering, rather I hope to show that it was a product of collective research and analysis. Indeed, Brian J. Coyle has been memorialized. His bust sits at the Minneapolis City Hall and Coyle is remembered for his place as the first openly gay city councilor elected in Minneapolis history. But even in this monumentalization, his contributions as a NAM member are effaced in his monument, in favor of his place as an icon of LGBT rights, a project that gives him a place within the narrative of national progress.

Chapter Layout

My first chapter addresses the tensions and eventual resolutions reached at the first convenings of NAM between 1971 and 1972. At their founding convention, an entire day was dedicated to Sexual Politics with additional discussions of racism and sexism.⁴³ I also speak to the sites of contention over gay liberation and socialist feminism while arguing that NAM was one of the most active groups directly engaging gay liberation both from within NAM and from within autonomous gay organizations.

This chapter also centers tensions between Old Left activists, (old) New Left activists, and New Left activists interested in socialist feminism at these early conferences. Members

⁴² Thomas R. Dunn, *Queerly Remembered: Rhetorics for Representing the GLBTQ Past*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

⁴³ Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Box 2. Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

were particularly concerned with a definition of the workers as industrial male laborers or a broader definition of workers that sought to challenge the terms of sexism, homophobia and racism. Along similar lines, NAM faced a decision about the function of leadership within socialist organizations. Specifically, I center the different visions for NAM's "American Socialism" as represented by Brian Coyle along with socialist feminists and Michael Lerner's organizing documents for NAM and his later reflections on the organization. I focus on relating Lerner's work to a draft of Coyle's speech at NAM's first organizing conference, a pamphlet he collectively published with other gay members after the conference, and writings from socialist feminists before, at, and after the conference.

In my second chapter, I turn to the rise of socialist feminism within NAM between 1972 and 1975. This chapter addresses what may be the most frequently cited event in NAM's history, the 1975 Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs Ohio, organized by the Dayton NAM chapter. This event resulted in a number of responses and is notably cited in "The Combahee River Collective Statement." As they note,

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.⁴⁴

While this comment predominantly addresses the conference in terms of a narrow ideology, the conference is frequently referenced for a variety of reasons including the lack of women of

⁴⁴ Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 362–72.

color in attendance, the wide range of viewpoints brought together, and the sheer size of the event. As Judith Ezekiel notes in *Feminism in the Heartland*, “The conference stirred up tremendous interest. Organizers initially expected three hundred participants, but between 2,000 and 2,500 people preregistered and organizers had to reject all but fifteen hundred.”⁴⁵ Further, Ezekiel cites this conference as a source of increased tension between New Left organizations, rather than as a coming together. She notes, “Despite the points of unity vocal opponents to the autonomous women’s movement attended, many from ultra-left parties... The conference offered them a platform and increased their impact on the movement. These and other divisions at the conference weakened many socialist feminist groups.”⁴⁶ It was also attacked by a number of other socialist groups who argued that women’s liberation and gay liberation were not central to a socialist project.

While there is no doubt that the 1975 Socialist Feminist Conference was a flashpoint in NAM’s history, in my second chapter I seek to contextualize this event within a larger set of engagements by NAM members with socialist feminism and a specifically lesbian perspective on gay liberation. To accomplish this, I draw on convention meeting notes, published newsletters, convention planning notes, and published pamphlets and working papers. I also center another socialist feminism conference held by NAM prior to the 1975 conference in Yellow Springs. In particular, I examine a speech from Judy Henderson that sought to integrate the personal and political through her personal experiences as a lesbian in a mixed socialist group.

⁴⁵ Judith Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 153.

⁴⁶ Ezekiel, 154.

In 1972, the Charlotte Perkins Gillman chapter of NAM in North Carolina, held what they identify as “the first feminism and socialism conference in the history of the world.”⁴⁷ As I discuss further in the chapter, NAM’s commitments to gay liberation and women’s liberation were not only an outlier amongst socialist groups, they also challenge contemporary histories and understandings of the 1970s. This chapter also highlights the collective nature of theorizing and acting in NAM, these conferences sought to present a variety of approaches to socialist feminism coming out of a range of contexts and locations.

Finally, my third chapter takes up NAM after the 1975 Socialist Feminist Conference and specifically addresses the waning involvement of NAM members in issues of sexuality, with a particular interest in responses from gay and lesbian NAM members who demanded that gay liberation continue to be considered centrally in the organization. However, by the late 1970s, gay liberation returned in force in NAM’s work. Here, I address the work of three different NAM chapters that specifically took up socialist feminism in relation to lesbianism. One of the most prominent examples of this work was Blazing Star, a lesbian group within the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, that joined NAM and published a number of texts on both socialist feminism and a socialist feminist understanding of sexuality. These members were also active in groups such as the GLF, other women’s centers, and the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce. Interestingly here, the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union played a variety of roles across NAM’s history and I seek to address how NAM sought to work with autonomous organizations,

⁴⁷ “Women’s Newsletter,” TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

at a time when many other socialist organizations sought to infiltrate and take over autonomous groups to expand their membership.

Each of my chapters speak to the wide range of people and perspectives across the United States NAM was able to engage. NAM's history highlights a mode of collective engagement that enabled both direct action and the theorizing of a variety of topics, and especially those of gay liberation and feminism, often left isolated within socialist organizations. In my epilogue, I turn to the importance of NAM today, especially in terms of how their utopian visions, which were certainly a product of the 1970s, continue to resonate in our present. I address contemporary socialist theorizing and the ways in which NAM prefigures and challenges the terms of our present. In each chapter, I seek to take up a reading of the power and possibility of sexuality for NAM across their discussions and debates. Aligning with Peter Drucker's argument in *Warped*, this project, and I would argue NAM's historical existence, is centrally concerned with

an alternative vision of LGBT life and struggle: of loving same-sex relationships, of ways of fighting for LGBT demands like partnership equality, and of queer politics. It is aimed at helping to rebuild a radical LGBT movement freed of the growing commercialism, middle-class assimilationism, prejudice and complicity in imperial projects that have increasingly characterized LGBT scenes and organizations in recent decades.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism*, Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 92 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 4.

Chapter One

Leaders and Liberation: NAM between 1971 and 1972

“While radical movements frequently used consciousness raising as an organizing tool, they also typically demanded that personal needs be subordinated to the needs of the Movement.”⁴⁹ -Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad*

As my introduction notes, NAM operated across the 1970s with a central investment in building a national organization that worked with and drew on the work of autonomous liberation movements, in particular gay liberation and women’s liberation. This portion of my project seeks to introduce the New American Movement through their early founding debates over organizational structure in relation to their efforts to include socialist feminism and sexual politics in their work. To do this, I center two debates central to NAM’s founding and early history. First, I address debates over the organizational structure of NAM, one that was predominantly on the place of leaders and figureheads in the organization versus the place of individual chapters. This debate was waged on a distinction between theory and practice, where some believed that figureheads and a common set of core principles would allow for a focus on organizing and acting. Others, fearful of repeating the collapse of SDS, sought to use NAM chapters to provide discussion and debate over the organization’s political principles. I will argue that this debate over leadership took place on terms that gendered theory and discussion as feminine, in contrast to the work of practice and organizing as masculine. Second, I address efforts to include “sexual politics” in NAM’s work, a task taken up by both socialist feminists and gay men active in gay liberation movements. In including sexual politics, both gay men and socialist feminists sought to move beyond simply coming out, an approach they associated with

⁴⁹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.

early Gay Liberation Front rhetoric, towards the possibility of political organizing around sexual and gendered identities. These early debates both offer an opportunity to consider one perspective on how NAM grew into a socialist feminist organization and also provide a previously unaddressed insight into how gay and lesbian socialists in the early 1970s articulated their political goals in relation to socialist organizing.

“A Way to Overcome the Mistakes of the Past”

“I called the organization the New “American” Movement precisely to highlight our affirmation of America even as we sought to struggle against its ruling elites and the misuse of American democracy by corporate powers. We picked Davenport, Iowa for our founding conference precisely because it had an authentic American flavor to it, and we hoped this would signal NAM’s differences from those movements based in old New Left centers—Cambridge, Massachusetts; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Berkeley, California; Madison, Wisconsin”⁵⁰ –Lerner

As I briefly mentioned in the introduction, NAM came into existence through a temporary National Organizing Committee predominantly made up of former SDS members who saw the takeover and turn to violence of the SDS by “the Weathermen,” a faction of the SDS, in 1969. Michael Lerner, a former leader of the SDS who gained national notoriety as one of the “Seattle 7,” would become an early and central voice for NAM. He would publish, with the rest of NAM’s Organizing Committee, “The New American Movement: A Way to Overcome the Mistakes of the Past” in June of 1971, prior to the first meetings that sought to organize NAM.⁵¹

This document, however, did not exist alone as an authoritative text on NAM, a few responses to it were also circulated. One central document was a letter from the Magnolia St.

⁵⁰ Michael Lerner, “Reflections on NAM,” in *The New American Movement: An Oral History*, ed. Victor Cohen (Indiana, Pa.: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 41.

⁵¹ Lerner, 21.

Collective, a group working within the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU), an autonomous women's organization. In their August 1971 letter, The Magnolia St. Collective argues that NAM's efforts to build a "mass movement" would be futile given their current organization leaders.⁵² They frame this comment in terms of the state of the new left in 1971, noting, "We expect that there are significant numbers of new left activists, floating for the last few years as a result of the catastrophic organizational disintegration which had taken place both in the mixed new left and in the women's movement." Like the early founders of NAM, the Magnolia St. Collective was centrally concerned about the possibility of creating a democratic "mass movement" when members internally seek to guide the direction of the organization to their particular factional perspectives. Further, they note that besides two NAM organizers, Staughton Lynd and Paul Booth, none of the NAM leaders had experiences with industrial labor organizing. Rather, they note that "NAM at its first level of organization will consist of almost entirely 'movement types,' namely students, anti-war activists, and intellectuals."⁵³ That is, NAM founders, "movement types," were ill positioned to "focus on organizing working people,"⁵⁴ when they were only tangentially positioned to perform this work with a much stronger base in student movements. This point would plague NAM throughout its existence.

The Magnolia St. Collective proposed that NAM could better serve activists by becoming a "resource center" aiming to act as a "stimulus for local organizing projects." Further, they

⁵² "Letter to NAM from Magnolia St. Collective," 22 Aug. 1971, TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "NAM Thanksgiving Conference Planned," Box 18, 1971 Convention Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

argue for putting off a “Thanksgiving Conference” indefinitely, until they are able to identify a key set of constituents and programs, rather than a general list of issues NAM would continue to propose. While it appears that NAM certainly considered these issues raised, the letter importantly notes that meeting with the CWLU was not a central aspect of NAM organizers’ visits to Chicago.⁵⁵ That is, they felt as if NAM was not considering them centrally in their work. And further, it is worth noting, though, that in the documents following an early October meeting of NAM organizers, the CWLU is mentioned centrally and NAM’s perspective on how to engage the autonomous women’s movement appears to lean heavily on this letter. Additionally, as I will discuss in chapter three, Blazing Star, a lesbian collective within the CWLU, would join NAM in the latter part of the 1970s and publish a cohesive set of Working Papers on approaching gay liberation through a socialist feminist perspective.

In early October of 1971, “the first national meeting of the New American Movement” occurred in Chicago. With approximately 100 attendees, this conference laid the basis for what would become the New American Movement. In this meeting, debates centered on the type of organization NAM would be.⁵⁶ Attendees determined that they “will attempt to become a mass organization as opposed to a cadre or sect group.” In contrast to other socialist groups at the time, NAM would also maintain “programs rather than highly developed political lines.” Here we begin to see an initial tension in organizational form, where groups like the SWP would maintain narrow ideological lines that, if overstepped, could result in expulsion, NAM asked of members that they agree to a set of principles that allow for a much wider range of theories

⁵⁵ “Letter to NAM from Magnolia St. Collective,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

⁵⁶ “NAM Thanksgiving Conference,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

and practice-based action. While NAM sought to distinguish itself from liberal reformists, they also wanted to open the organization to workers in many senses, including industrial workers but also white-collar workers as well.

The six principles initially agreed upon were: a recognition of a ruling class “which runs America for its own benefit,” a commitment to democratic socialism “which was defined as a society characterized by economic, racial, and sexual equality; by collective ownership and democratic control of means of production,” a distance from “welfare capitalism in England and Scandinavia,” a transition to socialism based in struggle, and “the liberation of women and non-white groups... incorporated into every programmatic area.” Addressing specifically “women’s and non-white movements,” NAM opted not to address “a program ‘on women’” in favor of accounting for “the special position of women in regards to any possible program areas.”⁵⁷ In this sense, the organization took a step away from many other socialist organizations that raised “the woman question” as a point of discussion within an already-formed socialist program. And, as we saw with the letter circulated by the Magnolia St. Collective, NAM clearly embraced working with the CWLU. A later “NAM Study Packet,” meant to introduce new members to the organization and its work, would further affirm this by including the Magnolia St. Collective letter with other central NAM texts.

Further, NAM sought to avoid confrontations with autonomous liberation movements, resolving, “NAM recognizes the necessity of autonomous women’s organizations and will encourage programs which can form alliances with such groups in a conscious effort to relate socialism and feminism, realizing that one cannot exist without the other.” Similarly, NAM

⁵⁷ Ibid.

committed to becoming “multi-racial in character,”⁵⁸ and supporting existing non-white organizations. The issue of racism within NAM, and their lack of non-white members would also persist throughout their organization’s history.

These points also mark a departure from the organizing work of groups such as the SWP and the Spartacist League, both of which were frequently at odds with autonomous groups. The SWP for example, faced accusations of infiltrating and undermining NOW meetings in an effort to align NOW with the SWP’s single perspective.⁵⁹ For NAM though, these groups posed no conflict and rather, NAM sought to build on the strengths of autonomous organizing to push for their larger vision. In line with their statement on women’s liberation, NAM committed to fifty-percent of “all leadership bodies” being “composed of women.” Thus, from its founding, NAM was an organization committed to a socialism informed by women and to some extent feminist thought. Although, importantly for this project, gay liberation did not appear in their initial planning work. Although, in a draft schedule of events for their initial “national conference,” held by Cicely Nichols who served as the editor of an internal education bulletin, gay liberation does appear on a list of “possible workshop areas” and would become a point of discussion at their first national meeting in Davenport, Iowa.

In terms of structure, the attendees determined that NAM must center “forms most likely to attract working people to the organization.” They decided that chapters would serve as the basis of their organization, allowing chapters to determine their own membership “within the general principles of NAM.” With regard to national leadership, the organization sought to

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “SWP: A Study in Political Parasitism,” *NOW Times*, PE.027, Box 2, SWP Newspaper Clippings 1952-1986 Folder, SWP Printed Ephemera, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

“include a large proportion of people who were involved in local organizing as well as regional representation.” They also elected a temporary National Interim Committee consisting of members from North Carolina, Michigan, Illinois, New York, Ohio, Iowa and Washington D.C. Further, they identified travelers to organize NAM chapters regionally, these initial regions were the Northwest, California, the Midwest, the South, the Northeast and the Southwest, Mountain and Plains states. Major figures in the New Left in attendance at this meeting included Michael Lerner, Jeremy Rifkin, Chip Marshall, Theirrie Cook and centrally to this project, Brian Coyle. At this meeting, attendees also “laid the basis for a Thanksgiving conference on program” which would take place in Davenport, Iowa.⁶⁰

We can also see the legacy of SDS in their approach. By embracing political principles rather than a strict program, they insulated themselves to some extent from in-fighting by factions seeking to sway an entire organization through leadership positions. Further, by allowing for a broad range of chapters to exist under NAM, they positioned the organization to create a truly “mass organization” of workers from a variety of perspectives and regions.

Over the next month, NAM circulated an initial founding document based on this meeting. Michael Lerner recounts his early experiences with NAM in an essay from an issue of *Works and Days* on NAM, edited by Victor Cohen. Lerner frames his investments in beginning NAM in relation to his experiences in SDS. He notes, that there was “this love/hate relationship with ‘democratic process.’ On the one hand, we all hated the phony kinds of democracy that prevailed in the larger American society that gave us choices between two pro[-]business and pro-war political parties. On the other hand, we wanted to end the war and not just sit around

⁶⁰ “NAM Thanksgiving Conference,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

talking about process and how to do it right and most democratically.”⁶¹ Here we see his investments in ensuring NAM had a stable leadership, that was also not micromanaging chapters, to ensure that they were not just sitting around talking.

On this basis he also argues that “My biggest concern, however, was building a movement organization that would reach out to working class Americans and connect them to the radical energies of the New Left. I had been attracted to organizations that claimed such a goal in the past, but all of them had turned out to be rigid sect groups that used Marx or Mao as holy texts rather than actually following what Marx had instructed.”⁶² Indeed, this perspective comes through in NAM’s original discussion as they sought to create an “American Socialism,” one based in the specific conditions of the working class in the US, rather than exclusively transposing work from other contexts.

By the end of October, Michael Lerner circulated a document titled “The NAM Strategy for 1972.” In this text, Lerner identifies himself, his partner at the time Therrie Cook, and his friend and fellow “Seattle 7” member, Chip Marshall, as the founders of NAM.⁶³ Further, he identifies electoral politics and collaborating with “the workers” as the necessary work of NAM in 1972. Placing NAM in relation to the Democratic and Republican parties, he advocates for a summer convention made up of workers and radicals from all walks of life that would challenge the two-party system in the US in the longer term. He concludes by discussing his vision for NAM’s American socialism and further that “We made it quite clear, in our written material,

⁶¹ Lerner, 37.

⁶² Lerner, 39.

⁶³ “The NAM Strategy for 1972,” 23 October 1971, TAM.051, Box 4, NAM NIC Minutes Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

that we wanted to build a particular kind of organization—not just any kind of organization that people wanted. And in everything we wrote we begged people who did not share our general vision to go elsewhere and do their own thing.”⁶⁴ Foreshadowing his experiences at NAM’s founding conference only a month away, those who did not share his vision certainly did not “go elsewhere” and did not “do their own thing.”

NAM’s Thanksgiving Conference: “A growing excitement that ‘something was happening’”

As I discussed in the introduction, in the same months that Lerner, Cook, Marshall, Booth and the Magnolia Collective were publishing and debating the organizational structure and principles of NAM, Brian Coyle was writing on his experiences as an out gay man in “movement circles.” The founding, “Thanksgiving Conference,” of NAM, in Davenport, brought these two discussions together. As Lerner reflects, he “envisioned a meeting of approximately one hundred organizers who would not discuss the founding principles about which they had agreed but would instead how best to reach working people (in the largest sense of the term) and implement NAM’s goals.”⁶⁵ But, what he found instead was 400 people from a variety of factions who had their own disagreements with all of the early organizational debates.

At Davenport, it is clear from all responses I have seen that there was deep sense of excitement as the event unfolded. The conference took place over four days and featured a focus on regional meetings to strengthen a local base that could support a national leadership, multiple meetings of the Women’s Caucus and a mix of panels and workshops. Where panels focused on raising and discussing important topics, one panel included a discussion of gay

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lerner, 41.

liberation that Brian Coyle spoke on, workshops were intended to begin the work of active local organizing in line with the initial principles of NAM. On the final day, there were also nominations and elections for leadership roles in the organization where all three founders Lerner discusses were not elected to leadership positions.⁶⁶

Regarding the leadership vote, Lerner states that “given the situation, I realized that playing a leadership role within the organization would be impossible.” While this is a fairly small point, it is worth noting that in his “NAM Strategy” document, prior to the convention, he explicitly states that he would not run for any leadership position.⁶⁷ While this point may be an anachronism, I believe that he accurately speaks to a sense of losing control of NAM on the grounds of his unwillingness to open the founding principles up to debate.

In 2010 Lerner described the meeting as follows:

Apart from the antileadership types, there was another group heavily represented in Davenport: refugees from the Communist Party U.S.A. They sought another home but insisted that NAM should not critique what they called “real existing socialism” in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, [or] what I called “the willful misuse of socialist ideals for the sake of maintaining power by a dictatorial elite.” Then there was a section of socialist feminist activists who resented that this organization was pulled together by two males and a “male-identified” female (my partner Theirrie). We knew that these tendencies existed in New Left members, but we imagined that their disagreements with us would lead them to ignore and denounce our efforts rather than cause them to show up and take over what we had started.⁶⁸

What I am most interested in here is a group Lerner elides in this quote, namely people who *did* align themselves with the founding principles laid out by Lerner but whose perspectives also differed dramatically from Lerner’s own view. Here I address two competing views of the family

⁶⁶ “NAM Thanksgiving Conference,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

⁶⁷ “NAM Strategy,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

⁶⁸ Lerner, 41.

that I believe speak across the issues of NAM's early leadership and intended structure, the leadership vote within NAM that denied the early leaders' place, and the possible place of "sexual politics" in NAM as understood by Brian Coyle.

From his personal notes, it is clear that Brian Coyle had read and was interested in the NAM founding documents. He specifically notes that NAM, and particularly Lerner, disavow the place of personal development and further he notes a "heavy emphasis on economic realities (no mention of w[omen] & gay movements contribution, but 'informing each programmatic proposal.')" In Brian Coyle's speech at Davenport, titled "Some Thoughts of Gay Men on the Relationship of Sexual Politics in the Emerging NAM or the Dialectic of The Limp Wrist or How to Unite the Gay Socialist Camp," Coyle begins by noting that "I was originally chosen to be on this panel because I'm a gay male; I prefer today not to talk about 'Gay Liberation...' It should become apparent during this brief rap why I've chosen not to address myself solely to 'the gay question' but rather why I've chosen to talk about the broader question of 'sexual politics.'"⁶⁹ Coyle approaches what he terms "the first wave of a contemporary 'Sexual Political' movement" as the work and emergence of women's and gay liberation organizations at and around the collapse of the SDS. He goes on to briefly discuss how he understands the early work of both of these movements in terms of a focus on personal development and consciousness raising. But, as he continues, "The whole development during the last few years has represented a maturity of our political activity, making everyday needs like love, family, subsistence, companionship POLITICAL... No revolution with a socialist outcome has so far

⁶⁹ "Some Thoughts of Gay Men on the Relationship of Sexual Politics in the Emerging NAM Speech," Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

derived its force solely or even perhaps predominantly from economic exploitation, but rather from the whole set of oppressions from which the revolutionary forces can legitimately promise liberation, and which the ruling class cannot.”⁷⁰ Here we see that for Coyle, the family is one location where women’s and gay liberation has done important work. Coyle also challenges NAM’s frame as originally laid out by Lerner. Coyle argues that socialist revolution cannot be driven exclusively by organizing on issues of “economic exploitation,” that is, he highlights the importance of understanding organizing in relation to “the whole set of oppressions,” namely racism, sexism, and heterosexism. He also lays the grounds for his later argument that liberation must involve all oppressed groups.

Later in the speech, he quotes the perspective of a white straight male worker from a GE Factory worker in the text “The Declaration of a Working American,” who feels equally alienated from both his own labor and those social movements that speak about liberation. He quotes, “liberation this and liberation that, liberation for everyone—yes everyone except families like mine, and we’re the majority... all we want is to get by this week and go into the next one without drowning in bills.”⁷¹ Coyle draws on this statement to argue that solidarity, without the loss of foundational liberatory stances is necessary. He argues, building on the work of Wilhelm Reich and the Situationist International,

the Left should wage a struggle now to subvert the reactionary influence of institutions like the nuclear family, school, and orthodox church, without waiting for the great social and political revolution which promises to destroy the very foundations of exploitation. No matter how successful the attempts to eliminate the bourgeois system of property relations; it must also overthrow the repressive morality of everyday life or be doomed

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

to failure. It is essential that the second front of sexuality be opened up in the class struggle and aim its efforts at the politicization of everyday life."⁷²

Returning to Lerner, while some of the original founders of NAM certainly felt that they were excised from their own organization, many others at Davenport felt that the restrictive frame initially proposed by organization leaders further affirmed and retrenched a misguided misogynist form of democracy. In Lerner's words he argues that

We wanted NAM to become known as the sane voice of a progressive movement. I argued that one of our foci should be to become a progressive profamily organization, showing that the dynamics of capitalism were working to undermine family stability. My point was to find aspects of the lives of working-class people that were causing pain, and to show how that pain was linked to the dynamics of an oppressive capitalism that was simultaneously waging an imperial war in Vietnam.⁷³

Here we can see two opposing invocations of the family that speak to the differing perspectives of Lerner and Coyle, and I would argue to some extent, the differing perspectives of NAM as conceived coming into Davenport and the NAM that left Davenport.

Lerner's comments make clear that what he saw in NAM was a group able to meet industrial workers where they are at through some of the means of movement types. He argues that NAM must be pro-family, and center the real, and assumed, investments of White workers in protecting and providing for their families. Thus, his project would highlight the ways that capitalism makes families unstable and focus on how capitalism produces and can only allow for wanting "to get by this week and go into the next," as the GE worker describes, and nothing more.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lerner, 42.

In contrast, Coyle argues that the nuclear family, following the work of socialist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, is the basis of social and psychological alienation and repression under capitalism. That is, for Coyle, a “sane voice,” is not one that embraces the family but rather one that recognizes the moralism inscribed on a psychic level through all institutions under capitalism. Importantly, Coyle’s speech is highly invested in following the early principles of NAM, it directly ties women’s and gay men’s experiences into NAM’s socialist programming on all levels. In the conclusion of his speech, Coyle offers a summary that extends his earlier writing in *Hundred Flowers*,

The question of the liberation of women & gays must not be posed as a normative ideal or as a mere adjunct to the main body of socialist theory, BUT BE STRUCTURALLY INTEGRATED INTO IT. We cannot step backwards to the old left slogans: ‘Black & White; Sisters & Brothers; Unite & Fight.’ We must defend our autonomous development while at the same time insisting that our theoretical insights be structurally integrated with socialist theory. If we are to have a slogan it should be: ‘We cannot make revolution alone, but there can be no real revolution without us.’⁷⁴

I believe that these concluding remarks from Coyle nicely summarize the perspective that NAM, as it moved forward, adopted. Namely, an embrace of autonomous organizations with a recognition that autonomy could only do so much. Further, I have hopefully shown thus far that NAM was distinct from many other socialist organizations at the time in that they did not come into their work with a sense that they had “all the answers,” thus they refused to take up “the woman/gay/race question” as an adjunct to socialist thought and rather sought to theorize and enact a socialism, an American socialism, that considered these questions as integral to any socialist praxis. As Richard Healey, a former SDS and later Berkeley NAM member, puts it, in an interview with Victor Cohen,

⁷⁴ “Some Thoughts of,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

In the '70s, there were a lot of Marxist-Leninist groups —the October League, which became the CPML [Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)], Bob Avakian and the Revolutionary CP [Communist Party], the CLP [Communist Labor Party], the CWP [Communist Workers' Party], the League of Revolutionary Workers, Marlene Dixon's League of Proletarian something-or-others. What was attractive about those groups was, first, like the CP before them, they had history on their side, or as my mother said, in their back pocket. They knew they were right, and they knew history would guarantee their success... and then you had NAM. I am only slightly flip when I say the humorless ones went off to be Marxists, Leninists, and Trotskyists [laughs]. We got left with the ones who couldn't stand the grimness of all that, people who were willing to grapple and experiment without having a received truth to guide us.⁷⁵

In this section, I laid out the shift of perspective, though leadership and “sexual politics,” that took place at NAM's Thanksgiving Conference in Davenport, Iowa. Though this conference was conceived as a jumping off point to move forward from a set of shared principles, in reality, this meeting resulted in substantial debate about the terms of NAM's principles, debates that would continue into their next national convention, publicized similarly as a “Founding Convention” in Minneapolis in 1972, some seven months after Davenport. Before turning to Minneapolis, I take up some of the written responses to the Thanksgiving conference.

Responses to Davenport: “A New Beginning”?

In the aftermath of the Thanksgiving Conference, a moment of excitement and possibility, the newly elected National Interim Committee set to work on building NAM while local chapters of NAM also began organizing and acting around the country. Here, I specifically address published articles by women and socialist feminists in NAM that summarize their experiences, positive and negative, in Davenport. I also address the experiences of gay men at the conference through the pamphlet Coyle and the “Beaux Arts Basement Club of Davenport,

⁷⁵ Victor Cohen, “Interview with Richard Healey,” in *The New American Movement: An Oral History*, ed. Victor Cohen (Indiana, Pa.: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 89, 93.

Iowa” published soon after and Coyle’s personal correspondence with other gay anti-war activists in the months following Thanksgiving. Finally, I look at a few letters and later commentary about this event from those leaders who originally proposed the creation of NAM.

Two members of the Women’s Caucus, Judy MacLean and Roberta Lynch, published a “Report on the Women’s Caucus” in the January issue of the NAM newspaper soon after the Davenport conference. Both Roberta Lynch and Judy MacLean would continue to have an important role in NAM, both in terms of socialist feminism and more generally, Roberta Lynch would become the national office coordinator after Brian Coyle’s departure in 1973.

Lynch and MacLean identify three agreements this caucus reached while also highlighting how the conference failed to fully address the place of women in NAM. They begin, “Our actual decisions were few: 1. There will be a women’s internal discussion bulletin in NAM, 2. The policy of having at least 50% women on all national bodies is continued, 3. Two of the women elected to the NIC [National Interim Committee] will be responsible for seeing that the concerns of women are fully represented in every area of NAM.”⁷⁶ Importantly they agreed that “there was also strong support for the idea of a NAM women’s conference in the early spring and several women agreed to work on this project,” this women’s conference would come to fruition, as I discuss further in my next chapter.

In terms of structural criticism, Lynch and MacLean point out that “We were limited by our inability to break out of the structures of the total conference, remaining locked in a single large group each time we met...” then, they identify three specific concerns, “1. The need to

⁷⁶ “Report on the Women’s Caucus,” Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

begin to practically and theoretically integrate our understandings of feminism and socialism, 2. The need to build NAM structurally as an organization actively struggling against sexism and racism in which every member can function in a non-alienating manner, 3. The need to broaden the base of NAM to include working people, particularly women and minority groups, through strong and viable programs.”⁷⁷ Here we can see some of the tensions of this meeting in terms of both the points of agreement and concern. In terms of an agreement, clearly NAM’s foundational commitment to “at least 50% women in leadership roles” was seen as an important aspect to the Women’s Caucus. But, while they recognize the importance of including women in “all programmatic areas,” they feel that this task requires some sense of what this actually looks like so as not to reduce women’s roles to tokenism.

As they continue, they highlight the structural issues at the conference that in the words of Coyle, may suggest they were “mere adjuncts” to a larger project. They note, “The agenda allotted only 2 ½ hours of a three day schedule for ‘women’s caucus,’ and our additional meetings were rushed and at awkward hours. The plenary sessions, at which all decisions were made, were dominated by men who function well in such an atmosphere—a situation oppressive to women and to many men who cannot or will not adapt to those circumstances.”⁷⁸ Here we can also see the tenets of the women’s movement entering NAM, wherein MacLean and Lynch challenge the terms of not only specific discussions, but the structural barriers preventing women’s full participation within the conference. They push this point noting that “our very presence in Davenport indicates that we do not find a separatist

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

women's movement a sufficient answer... The directions of the women's movement—collective work, non-elitist leadership, a personalization of politics—should not be lost in the interest of vague and artificial unity.”⁷⁹ In distancing themselves from exclusive involvement with autonomous women's organizations, they recenter their investments in NAM's “mass organization” approach while noting that the ideals of the larger women's movement are relevant to all members of NAM, not simply the Women's Caucus. They specifically critique the “constant emphasis on ‘the working class’ which pervaded the conference” noting that “there seemed to emerge a monolithic image of a white, male, forty year old, blue collar, heavy industrial worker.”⁸⁰ Much like my previous discussion of Lerner's and Coyle's perspectives on families, Lynch and MacLean align themselves with a wider notion of “*all* working people (including those unemployed or on welfare).” And further, in identifying “vague and artificial unity” they speak to the need to welcome all NAM members “in a non-alienating way,” thus pushing for genuine collective discussion and engagement.⁸¹ While Lerner and possibly the original NAM leaders may have felt that socialist feminists were seeking to divide NAM, in as much as they did not begin from his presumption of consensus, they also clearly articulate their investments in his larger project.

After this paper was published, Kathryn Johnson, a member of Berkeley NAM who was also in attendance in Davenport, responded to Lynch and MacLean's work with some initial starting points for linking NAM's socialism and feminism. She points out that “Their challenge that we women must link the women's movement and socialism by building NAM into a non-sexist

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

organization and by expanding NAM's base to including working people, particularly women and third world people, seems a staggering, almost insurmountable task. Yet it is the urgency and even excitement this challenge evokes that makes me write."⁸²

Johnson would push the first effort to substantially link socialism and the women's movement in an essay circulated prior to the Minneapolis convention, so I will begin with her comments in that essay at the start of my next chapter. For now though, I want to point out this sense of excitement Johnson speaks to as I believe it resonated with many in attendance in Davenport. As Richard Healey's earlier quote noted, NAM did not "have history in their back pocket" the way other socialist organizations did and this, for many, left open what an American socialism was and could be. For many, it was an opportunity to link insights from autonomous movements to a socialist theory on a level they had not seen before.

As a result of the Davenport conference, a pamphlet titled "Some thoughts of Gay Men on the Relationship of the Sexual Politics to New American Movement" was "written by one gay brother and added to by four others who met throughout the New American Movement convention in Davenport, Iowa," and "is for circulation amongst both gays and straights within and without NAM." Based on the similarities of this text to Coyle's previous speech, and his own notes on it, I believe Coyle is the "one gay brother" referenced here. Their text begins with two central themes that echo both Coyle's *Hundred Flowers* articles and the perspectives of MacLean and Lynch I previously discussed,

Each of us came to New American Movement's Davenport conference feeling alone as homosexuals, wondering if other gay people would be there and who would initiate

⁸² "an open letter to nam sisters," Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Box 2. Brian J. Coyle Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

discussion. Each faced--once again—the dilemma of how to relate to the predominantly straight Left. We came to the Davenport Conference—and not the nearby National Gay Thanksgiving in Madison—because we sensed that the movement as a whole is in a transitional period. We hoped that Davenport’s meeting might represent the new beginning of a diverse, multi-tendencies mass movement for revolutionary change. Now, we do think that Davenport witnessed a new beginning.⁸³

Here, we see that gay men also felt the need to move outside of autonomous organizing and towards a mass movement noting later that “We want to avoid false separatism... and our oppression can only be alleviated when diverse oppressed groups unite to make a broadly based movement for a socialist revolution.”⁸⁴

And further, we see the same sense of excitement outlined by women and even Lerner in his earlier statements. Yet this sense of possibility also came with structural criticism of the convention. They note that “no provision was made for gay workshops or caucuses and formalistic recognition has never been given to gay people in NAM organizing literature... we were simply ignored.”⁸⁵ They also, following Coyle’s speech, turn to a notion of sexual politics to articulate resonant experiences of gay men and women at Davenport, “Besides ignoring the gay liberation movement, it originally acknowledged the women’s contribution as merely ‘informing each programmatic proposal.’ Since the Chicago meeting, however, significant numbers of women... will help the development of a feminist perspective within NAM.”⁸⁶ Thus, while many felt a sense of excitement in this moment, they also maintained reservations about this excitement being maintained and NAM not simply adopting a perspective of “mere economism.” As they articulate, “Perhaps most importantly... The idea that women, gays and

⁸³ “Some Thoughts of,” Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

sensitive straight men ‘should suppress their mere subjective feelings in order to be politically objective’ (as one hallway conversationalist at Davenport put it) or that those distinct groups should submerge their identities and struggles to a one-dimensional concept of ‘anti-capitalist unity’ and ‘support of the industrial working class’—these economist ideas should be rejected by NAM.”⁸⁷ These concerns about economism come out of how socialist groups have largely sought to address class as the only and most important base issue, often suggesting that gayness “would go away with the revolution” or is some effect of “bourgeois decadence” left at the level of superstructure.

The group specifically identifies the SWP/YSA’s approach to homosexuality as a path they do not want NAM to follow, one where gay members would relate to NAM “as individuals whose ‘primary commitment’ is to their ‘vanguard revolutionary party’... NAM aims at developing a truly mass movement for socialism and consequently, provision must be made at its beginning for liberation groups within the New American Movement.”⁸⁸ Again, in line with the comments from Lynch and MacLean, there is a sense here that NAM can offer a different approach from similar organizations and must be open to this possibility. They conclude their discussions by noting two “isolated essays” that have been written on gay liberation and socialism, one by David Thorstad of the SWP and one by Miriam of “IS’s [International Socialists’] gay caucus.”⁸⁹ Interestingly, both groups had ties to NAM members and after the Minneapolis Convention, an IS member would reach out to NAM.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Soon after the Thanksgiving Conference, Coyle was also in contact with other gay anti-war activists and movement members. In a series of exchanges between Coyle and anti-war activist John Kyper, we can see how NAM members' experiences with homophobia are not limited to their circles. In the earliest response I have identified between the two, Kyper notes that a gay veteran's published essay of "his criticisms of the VVAW's ignorance of gay people is very similar to your criticisms of NAM's, as expressed in your pamphlet."⁹⁰ As Kyper continues, he raises his own critiques of gay liberation and importantly centers his issues with Carl Wittman's 1969 "Gay Manifesto" though which, he notes, "many of us came out with that article—but then left the gay movement because it could not take them beyond the point of self-affirmation." Kyper continues by addressing the struggle of gay liberation groups only three years after Stonewall, "Boston's gay movement has disintegrated. The Mattachine-type Homophile Union of Boston has folded" and further, he identifies the distance he feels from both gay liberationists' "more-radical-than-thou hysterics" including "inscribing graffiti on walls" and "adhering to the accepted Revolutionary line and forcing people to accept it as a condition of being accepted" he notes that neither "attract me as the essence of gay liberation."⁹¹ Here, we can read the excitement of NAM members who attended Davenport with new context. As Kyper discusses how gay liberation efforts are stagnating, and to some extent stuck on coming out and autonomy, movement circles, however fraught, seem to offer respite for gay people looking for more. Importantly, Kyper also includes membership dues for NAM in his letter, a sign to me that he sees the same moment of possibility in NAM's work that

⁹⁰ Correspondence between John Kyper and Brian Coyle, Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁹¹ Ibid.

others have responded to. Indeed, he concludes by noting, “a need for a more coherent philosophy. Being Gay and Proud is not enough. And single-issue organizations are not going to be our salvation.”⁹²

In Coyle’s response to Kyper, we get a better sense of his investments in NAM. Coyle continues with Kyper’s points about the state of the gay liberation movement and argues, “Most gay radicals I know are currently embittered about the imitations of the first phase of gay lib. They have gone back to highly privatized relationships. The few who are interested in fighting for gay rights or allying with sympathetic groups tend to move into the Democratic party. Apparently they hope to ally with liberal, straight politicians who will at least listen to them.”⁹³ Again, we can see the few good options afforded to gay men looking to expand the frame of gay liberation beyond “self-affirmation” and initial “exhilarating” coming out experiences. As John D’Emilio would write, discussing what allowed gay liberation to thrive, post-Stonewall activists redefined “‘coming out,’ which doubled as both ends and means for young gay radicals.”⁹⁴ For Coyle, Kyper, and other young radicals in NAM, coming out may have been a means, but certainly could not be an end in itself. In terms of a second step, Coyle advocates for seeing “the sexual politics which women’s and gay liberation introduced opened up to everyone so the very underpinnings of sexual repression are subverted.”⁹⁵ This point clearly aligns with Wilhelm Reich’s recently translated work on German socialism and psychoanalysis in the 1930s. Further, in a perspective that will be taken up on different terms

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 235.

⁹⁵ Correspondence between John Kyper and Brian Coyle, Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

by later NAM members, Coyle argues “that sexual expression is an important energy too. And a ‘socialist’ society would be one which acknowledges that the positive expression of sexuality can benefit society as a whole.”⁹⁶ Here we see a starting point for understanding sexual politics as an essential project for all people and not simply one voiced for a “minority” and further, based on these letters, efforts to work at this intersection had been fairly isolated and individual.

Conclusion

The early founding debates in NAM that I have laid out here demonstrate how NAM came to define itself as a socialist feminist organization. I have argued that NAM’s early history focused on two competing definitions of “the workers,” on one hand as men in industrial sectors, and on the other as all people who experience oppression under capitalism. The approach of socialist feminists and gay men, which understood “the workers” as all oppressed people under capitalism, would become central in NAM’s political platform. This turn at NAM’s Thanksgiving Conference would set the stage for the development of a socialist feminist perspective in NAM, which my next chapter focuses on. However, although socialist feminism became the frame for NAM’s work, concerns about internal sexism in the organization and the rise of tendencies that challenged socialist feminism would continue throughout NAM’s existence. Indeed, in NAM’s efforts to operate on democratic and non-hierarchical terms, socialist feminists would need to continue to defend their new-found status quo in the face of other socialist perspectives that grew in the organization.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Two

Developing a (Lesbian) Socialist Feminism in NAM: 1972-1975

In April of 1977, The Combahee River Collective published their landmark “the Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement.” This text has been identified as essential to Black Feminist Thought and remains frequently cited for pushing feminist thought to consider multiple forms of oppression. In this statement, they assert their position as Black socialists and feminists and demand a critique of capitalism that is able to address their specific class position. They raise important critiques of separatist, liberal, and white feminist understandings of oppression and assert the need for an alternative.

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.⁹⁷

Essential to this project, the Combahee River Collective also addressed the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio. This conference, occurring in 1976, was centrally organized by the Dayton, OH chapter of NAM. Further, NAM’s involvement in this conference has produced the bulk of historical work on NAM’s socialist feminism that exists. For example, Judith Ezekiel intimately documents the work of Dayton’s NAM Chapter in arranging the conference in her book *Feminism in the Heartland*. By specifically addressing the conference in terms of NAM’s organizational history, I hope to offer some texture to the place of this conference within their socialist feminist and gay liberation-based theorizing. Where my first

⁹⁷ Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement.”

chapter took up the emergence of NAM through their founding debates on leadership, this chapter turns to how NAM's newly adopted socialist feminist perspective was developed by NAM members over the next four years.

As Sarah Evans argues, the aftermath of the 1975 conference also marked the growth of socialist feminism, while women's unions and the autonomous women's movement were fading. The late 1970s also saw the publication of Zillah Eisenstein's *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* and Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* coupled with the growth of women's studies departments in the United States.⁹⁸ Beyond staging a conference that would catalyze socialist feminism in the late 1970s, NAM would also count some, now influential, socialist feminists among their members. As I will discuss at the end of this chapter, Barbara Ehrenreich, now a well-known figure in both socialist feminist activism and theorizing was a member of NAM who played an important role in forwarding NAM's socialist feminist perspective. Although I have yet to come across archival records of this, Judith Gardiner, a former NAM member and feminist scholar, notes that influential socialist feminist scholars Allison Jaggar and Iris Marion Young, were also NAM members.⁹⁹

Here I consider the work of a diverse range of socialist feminists in NAM, from 1972 through 1975, that would lay the ground for the well-known National Socialist Feminist Conference and a growth in socialist feminist theorizing. That is, in this chapter I seek to chart a rhetorical history of this now well-known conference through the earlier work of NAM members in and beyond Dayton. As I argued in my first chapter, NAM's 1972 founding

⁹⁸ Judith Kegan Gardiner, "What Happened to Socialist Feminist Women's Studies Programs? A Case History and Some Speculations," *Feminist Studies; College Park* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 558-583,621.

⁹⁹ Gardiner, "Ambitious Moderation," 64 n19.

convention in Davenport was marked by a theoretical and practical divide over how NAM should go about producing a “mass movement.” While early NAM initiators such as Michael Lerner sought to target male industrial workers in NAM’s organizing, many socialist feminists and gay men argued for a wider understanding of workers that included oppressed groups and an engagement with autonomous liberation movements. This chapter documents the work of the latter members, socialist feminists, that would come to play a central role in the direction of the organization.

I argue that NAM members, as a result of the “moment of possibility” both within the organization and within a larger moment of activism and organizing in the 1970s, reinvented socialist and feminist thought through political commitments that sought to read across these two bodies of theory and practice. Further, I argue that the specific consideration of sexuality within a socialist feminist theory produced a shift from “the personal is political” to one that argued that the political, and theoretical, are also personal. As I discussed in my previous chapter, I draw on internal meeting notes, NAM Women’s Caucus Newsletters, NAM conference proceedings, and NAM statements and pamphlets, held predominantly at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive at NYU, to demonstrate the dispersed and frequently contradictory arguments for socialist feminism forwarded by NAM chapter members from across the United States, from North Carolina, Vermont, Iowa, Illinois, California, and Minnesota. To approach the National Socialist Feminist Conference, I also highlight its connection to and disjuncture from NAM’s earlier 1972 “Socialist Feminist Conference” that took place in North Carolina and was organized by the Charlotte Perkins Gillman Chapter (C.P. Gilman).

I begin with preparations for two interrelated NAM events in 1972, the June Minneapolis Founding Convention which was planned through the National Interim Committee (NIC) after the 1971 Thanksgiving Conference in Davenport, and the Socialist Feminist Conference in Durham, North Carolina which took place over Thanksgiving and was planned by a wide range of socialist feminists and NAM members. I then turn to developments in NAM's theorizing and actions between 1973 and 1975 that immediately preceded the 1975 National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Between Davenport and Minneapolis: A Perspective Taking Shape

As I discussed in my previous chapter, following NAM's Davenport Conference, Roberta Lynch and Judy MacLean published an article in the January issue of the *New American Movement* laying out the concerns and possibilities raised by the Women's Caucus meeting at the convention. These comments included the sexism women members experienced at the conference, and a need to genuinely integrate women's liberation in all programmatic aspects of NAM's political statement.

In response to Lynch and MacLean's call for continued discussion of women's involvement in NAM, Kathryn Johnson replied in "an open letter to nam sisters." Johnson writes seeking to take up Lynch and MacLean's

challenge that we must link the women's movement and socialism by building NAM into a non-sexist organization and by expanding NAM's base to include working people, particularly women and third world people, seems a staggering, almost insurmountable task. Yet it is the urgency and even the excitement this challenge evokes that makes me write. My ideas are inchoate and tentative. We are all only beginning to define what we, as women, will do in the Berkeley chapter.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ "an open letter to nam sisters," Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

In the months after the Davenport Conference, it is clear that a sense of possibility remained open. Here, Johnson articulates this feeling once again, without “history in their back pocket,” she sought to engage the emergent nature of NAM as an American socialist movement, with the ongoing, if open, women’s liberation movement. She then moves to problematizing the role of women at the Davenport Conference by linking women’s experiences at the event to symbolic and structural barriers in NAM’s organizing. She argues that “[t]he fact that women were expected to do time and a half, attending the ‘main’ workshops in addition to the women’s caucus meant to me that our concerns were regarded as complementary to the dominant conference issues... it is clear that the full implications of women’s struggle have yet to be integrated into NAM organizationally.”¹⁰¹ This move appears to directly connect prior and contemporaneous experiences of women in socialist organizations being treated as “mere adjuncts” to a larger socialist movement. That is, she challenges the terms of socialist organizing that reduced women to “the woman question” a perpetual, if tangential, theoretical issue that was important, but not nearly as important as organizing men in industry. Johnson does not, however, begin with the “woman question” in theory, rather she points to explicit practical agenda items NAM must engage to build “NAM into an organization actively struggling against sexism.”¹⁰²

To this end, Johnson lays out three ways to address this goal, “*Encouraging the development of women’s caucus in local chapters,*” “*Working with those men in NAM who share our concern with linking personal oppression to the capitalist system*” and “*Hold a conference a*

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

few days prior to the June convention to discuss the role of women in NAM."¹⁰³ These three practical considerations would prove essential to later socialist feminist organizing in NAM so I offer an initial discussion of each here.

In terms of building women's caucuses, Johnson explicitly distances her understanding of caucuses from larger women's consciousness raising groups. Rather than having "traditional small groups where women engage in consciousness-raising and provide mutual support" or having a "study group where women in a freer atmosphere undertake internal education," Johnson advocates for a focus on "developing a woman's perspective on on-going programs or generating a program that addresses socialist women's concerns."¹⁰⁴ This framing of women's caucuses asserts their essential function within NAM chapters. It would appear that Johnson's argument turns on an internal-external divide. She reads "traditional consciousness raising" and women's study groups as internally focused, seeking to develop collective understandings of women's experiences that then may or may not be shared in larger chapter meetings. In contrast, she asserts the role of women's caucuses in directly addressing the programmatic strategies of NAM and raising necessary questions about the place and function of women's experiences in all of NAM's work. Thus she demands that the personal be addressed explicitly as the political work of NAM, extending personal experiences as necessarily political to all in NAM.

Her second pragmatic point builds on this perspective as she argues that "we should encourage men's groups within chapters" and demands that women work "*with those men in*

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

NAM who share our concern."¹⁰⁵ Here, she reframes historical socialist engagements with "the woman question," which would frequently pose women as tangential or in need of being "added" to a socialist project, by asserting the need for men to raise their own consciousness, and struggle against their own oppressive behaviors. She argues

I am not implying men, like women, are oppressed on the basis of their sex. Men are oppressed as workers. In order to be effective workers, men have been socialized to be aggressive, competitive, and rational. The function of such groups would be to help men come to grips with these destructive traits, to help them, as similar devices have helped women, to avoid rationalization and so to clarify their politics and to finally avoid feeling guilty for being male chauvinists.¹⁰⁶

In this manner, Johnson refuses to leave consciousness raising within the domain of women, she articulates a perspective that women are not solely responsible for educating men and that they can and must work against their own chauvinist tendencies, produced, like the oppression of women, as a result of the demands of capitalist labor.

Finally, Johnson argues for a women's conference prior to NAM's Minneapolis convention. She notes that placing this conference immediately before the larger NAM Convention, would help avoid forcing women to make two independent trips across the country, refusing to mirror women's experiences of "time and a half" work at Davenport. Further, and importantly for the rest of this chapter, she argues that the proposed women's conference should have an "opportunity for women from the autonomous women's movement to share their thoughts with us and explore the possibility of parallel co-operation."¹⁰⁷ While, as far as I have seen, a full pre-convention women's conference never took place, the day before

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the convention started with caucus time and women's organizing events did take place and the lead-up to the Minneapolis Convention involved a number of women in NAM centrally concerned with what socialist feminism should and could look like within NAM. Importantly here though as well, I want to acknowledge that while Johnson's work did not directly consider sexuality or sexual politics, it was not simply ignored by NAM members.

Along with Johnson's open letter, women from Minneapolis' NAM chapter circulated "A Feminist Proposal for the National NAM Conference." In this one-page statement, they argue that "There has long been a serious split between radical feminist politics and socialist politics—a division which has grown deeper in the last few years... We see that the way to end [this division] is to make feminism a foundation for any serious efforts to build socialism."¹⁰⁸ First, they advocate for arranging multiple regional meetings, the results of which could be circulated nationally. Second, they assert a need for a full day specifically addressing "feminist issues," echoing Johnson they justify this day by arguing, "we believe that feminist politics are not the sole property or responsibility of women and that both sexes must share equally in the struggle to end sexism."¹⁰⁹ Further, they advocate for random mixed group meetings at the convention where men and women could discuss their perspectives in settings that may encourage more explicit involvement of women. This point, along with a day for "sexual politics" would be taken up. They also lay out 11 possible agenda items for a day dedicated to feminist issues: "women's health, the family, alternatives to the family, sexuality (straight and gay), reproduction (abortion, contraception), commitments to each other (personal and political), oppression of

¹⁰⁸ "A Feminist Proposal for the National NAM Conference," Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

children, sexism in education, sexism at the outside workplace, sexism and Third World Women, sexism and class.” This expansive list demonstrates a large variety of “feminist issues” that specifically place feminism in relation to the heart of class, society, and the family.

At the June National Interim Committee (NIC) Meeting in Minneapolis, some three weeks before the conference, a number of the topics raised by Johnson, Lynch, Coyle, and MacLean, as well as other members of NAM, were clearly under consideration, and both Roberta Lynch and Brian Coyle, whose role in advocating for an understanding of sexuality in NAM’s work I discussed in chapter one, attended the meeting. Within the NIC, the notes indicate a discussion of “the problems of being a woman in the leadership... There hasn’t been the support that women need to function in leadership.”¹¹⁰ Further, the NIC laid out a plan for “Sexual Politics Day” on the basis that “sexual politics can be most meaningfully discussed now since there has been considerable exchange of ideas and materials about sexism and feminism” and that “future conventions should devote time to the consideration of racism and class bias as primary issues of concern.”¹¹¹ This move seems to suggest on one hand that the NIC was centrally concerned with continuing the excitement expressed by NAM members for engaging sexual politics, but in this instance it appeared somewhat at the expense of considering other oppressed groups. This line affirms the NIC’s previous discussions in January of 1972 where they sought to “become multi-racial” and were at the point of “develop[ing] contacts nationally with Third World groups” while they were much more explicit in arguing that “NAM must reveal its anti-sexist (pro-feminist) character on all levels before much of the skepticism of women’s

¹¹⁰ “Minutes of the NIC Meeting June 3 & 4,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM 72 NIC Meetings Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

groups will be changed.”¹¹² Thus it would appear that NAM felt they had the necessary activity on anti-sexism to allow for immediate activity and action while approaches to race were still developing.

As the June NIC meeting discussion indicates, a number of sexism-based appeals were raised. I continue here by discussing four of these appeals, Kathryn Johnson and Peggy Somers’ statement on socialist feminism, a statement from the Dekalb Chapter of NAM, and finally, Brian Coyle and Henry Guinn’s statement on sexism. I then turn to the Minneapolis Convention and the positions that were drafted for consideration in relation to those that were ultimately adopted by NAM. I pay particular attention to the tensions and solutions each text proposes for addressing the apparent divide between autonomous women’s movements and socialist movements as they existed at the time.

Linking Socialism & Feminism?

In June of 1972, as the Minneapolis Convention was approaching, Kathryn Johnson and Peggy Somers of Berkeley NAM produced a draft pamphlet titled “The Political Economy of Sexism or Behind Every Sexist Stands the Boss.” In this paper they argue that both the socialist and the autonomous women’s movement’s analysis are incomplete. They lay out a view within socialist work wherein “[s]exism is understood as a by-product of the basic working class/capitalist relationship” and within the women’s movement wherein “[s]exism is thus understood as originating in the basic male/female relationship and/or in the pre-capitalist

¹¹² “Summary Report of the National Interim Committee Meeting, Pittsburgh, Jan. 22/23,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM 72 NIC Meetings Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

sexual division of labor”¹¹³ following Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*. Within this divide, Johnson and Somers argue that the issue at hand is not the sexual division of labor, and rather the “sexual division of production.” That is, the sexual division of production must be understood as dividing the family, “in which women are the primary producers” inside the family and the “(outside) workplace, where men are the primary producers.”¹¹⁴ They further align this with the ideological division between the public and the private. Yet, by turning to “sexual division of production,” they are able to maintain a definition of class struggle where both the family and the workplace are controlled by capitalism, through its organization of production. As they argue, “understanding sexism as a direct consequence of this division directs our struggle against the class which maintains it. It is a class struggle, one which will unite the working class—both men and women.”¹¹⁵ Thus through a turn to the sexual division of production rather than labor, Johnson and Somers articulate a conception of socialism that may be able to speak across women’s movements and socialist movements. Again, it is worth noting in the context of this project that non-straight sexuality or considerations of the family as heterosexual did not arise in this discussion, likely as a result of the author’s efforts to follow Firestone’s work which also does not center the role of sexuality in the family. Further, in many ways their understanding of patriarchy and capitalism seems to align with a “dual systems” theory of socialism wherein the two systems of public life and private life are treated interdependently and at times are contradictory. Importantly, as I discuss in my next section,

¹¹³ “The Political Economy of Sexism or Behind Every Sexist Stands the Boss,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

the “sexual division of production” would be adopted as an aspect of NAM’s political platform as a result of the Minneapolis Convention.

In addition to Johnson and Somers, Dekalb NAM members also circulated an argument for NAM’s perspective out of Juliet Mitchell’s *Woman’s Estate*. In *Woman’s Estate*, Mitchell would argue during a discussion of the relationship between socialism and feminism, “economic demands are still primary but must be accompanied by coherent policies for the other three elements (reproduction, sexuality and socialization).”¹¹⁶ Dekalb NAM would draw on Mitchell’s argument about the “polarization between socialism and feminism” towards a claim that “this list of polarizations cannot be synthesized.”¹¹⁷ The chart reads as follows:

Radical Feminists	Abstract Socialists
Men are the oppressors.	Men are not the oppressors: It’s the system.
All societies have been male supremacist.	Capitalism oppresses women.
It starts with a psychological power struggle—which men win.	It starts with private property.
Socialists have nothing to offer us.	We’ve got to discover our relationship to socialism
Socialist countries oppress women.	The scene isn’t too good in socialist countries for women—but that’s because women’s liberation wasn’t part of the revolutionary struggle.
What we want is <i>all</i> women to unite against men and male-dominated society.	It’s most necessary to convince men of the importance of our struggle. They are oppressed by their roles too.
We want to liberate women from male oppression.	All people are alienated under capitalism, we want to liberate everybody to become “whole people.”

¹¹⁶ Juliet Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 100.

¹¹⁷ “Dekalb NAM Statement,” Box 2, Sexual Politics and NAM Folder, Brian J. Coyle Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

Within this frame of an unreconcilable tension between autonomous women's groups and socialist thought as they have stood, Dekalb NAM members lay out an alternative approach. Building an argument that women experienced degradation in 60s organizing efforts that resulted in an experience of "oppression that contradicted socialist ideal—the democratization of all spheres of life," as women were left in menial roles in the movement, "they typed, they cleaned up, took care of details, and remained powerless." They argue in this frame, that as Marxistis, they must begin "with a primary material struggle—the struggle for survival."¹¹⁸ And further they argue that "If all societies have been male supremacist, they have also been compelled to find the means for survival in the face of crushing deprivation and oppressing want."¹¹⁹ Essentially then, they turn to suffering, as a result of false scarcity, as the basis of oppression, "Suffering and want have locked human beings into a developing pattern of oppressive social relations. The ways in which women are forced to function to perpetuate the old order should not be seen as the sources of their oppression, but rather symptoms of it."¹²⁰ In this conception of a "feminist socialist" perspective, treating capitalist oppression as "a failure to provide sufficiency—enough material sustenance to enable people to lead human lives—" can allow for an analysis of "particular kinds of effects such a failure has had on all of us—the psychological crime against our innate potential to engage in that which characterizes our species life—free conscious activity."¹²¹ Thus, through the lens of suffering, a feminist socialist perspective would allow for an analysis of dominant ideologies, the work of both

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹²¹ Ibid, 6.

radical feminists and socialists, without the necessity of locating this oppression in either men's wage labor alone or women's oppression by men alone.

Rather, their perspective aligns with their concluding charge, "Let us not narrow the scope of such [liberatory] activity in our own mind because the dominant ideology of our times has narrowed it... Let us go where we can find out all the ways scarcity is artificially imposed in the teeth of material wealth beyond the scope of the most visionary Utopians."¹²² In this final call, DeKalb NAM members assert the possibility to see otherwise within the confines of their present. They, in line with my previous discussion of a moment of possibility, take up a call to push NAM's socialist perspective beyond its supposed limits towards one that can produce new alternatives. Although I return to this perspective in my epilogue, I believe it poses an early challenge to histories of socialist feminism that tend to argue that the late 1970s were marked by a "dual systems theory" of socialism wherein class and patriarchy were considered as interdependent but essentially different political struggles. DeKalb NAM's turn to scarcity as a source of women's *and* men's oppression points toward the possibility of, but fails to fully theorize, an argument more in line with a "unitary theory of oppression," which would include both production and reproduction within the same framework.

Brian Coyle and Henry Guinn also circulated what I believe was an amendment to NAM's draft political statement at the Minneapolis Convention. As I have discussed Coyle fairly substantially in my first chapter, I will only offer a brief introduction to Guinn here. Having served in the Army, he joined the anti-war movement in 1969 after being stationed in Korea. Guinn then joined NAM in 1972 and in his candidacy statement for an NIC position, he notes

¹²² Ibid, 6.

that “The emphasis in NAM on sexual politics has been the most valuable tool in... bring[ing] gay people closer to NAM.”¹²³ In Coyle and Guinn’s short statement titled “Sexism and The Gay Movement,” they discuss autonomous gay movements as “parallel to the women’s struggle.”¹²⁴

They suggest that

NAM sees within the gay movement still another sector wherein the oppressive nature of bourgeois society is most acute. We support the autonomous gay movement in its struggle for legal toleration and social acceptance. However, we also realize that we must actively work to help the gay movement gain the insight that their liberation cannot be achieved by an isolated struggle within the framework of capitalist society, but only in the context of the transformation of society on a socialist basis.¹²⁵

Echoing Coyle’s earlier work and writing on gay liberation and socialism, we can see an investment in and indebtedness to autonomous movements while maintaining that struggles against oppression cannot be reached without the rise of a socialist movement. But it is once again worth recognizing that thus far, socialist feminist perspectives in NAM, as I have discussed, were largely concerned with women without consideration of lesbianism, with the exception of the Minneapolis NAM statement I mentioned. And similarly, Coyle and Guinn do not address the developments of a socialist feminist perspective I have laid out, and rather pose gay liberation in relation to the interrelated discussions of the women’s movement and socialist perspectives in NAM.

Under Construction: NAM’s Socialist Feminism in Minneapolis

Prior to the Convention held between June 22 and 25 in Minneapolis, the NIC circulated a working paper “Revised Draft Political Statement” that would be up for consideration and

¹²³ “Candidacy for the NIC—Henry Guinn—27—Austin, TX,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹²⁴ “Sexism and The Gay Movement,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

debate. Rather than reviewing the entire document, I am particularly interested in three specific sections of the statement that were adopted during the convention, namely their section on “Sexism,” the addition of a section on “Gaysexuality & oppression,” and their statement on the “composition of the working class.”¹²⁶

Coming into the convention, the political statement contained the following 7 sections: an introduction, “Capitalism in Crisis & Criticism of the New Left,” “The Nature of Capitalism & the Socialist Movement,” “Composition of the Working Class,” “Racism & Sexism,” “Internationalism,” “Socialism: a Viable Alternative,” “What NAM is Now & Intends to Become,” and “NAM & the Revolutionary Process.” In their section on the “Composition of the Working Class,” the statement articulates an understanding of the working class that is diversified, stratified and consisting “of all those who have to sell their labor power in order to live or who must work without pay in the home.”¹²⁷ Further, NAM argues that this understanding of the workers is a necessary product of the current state of capitalism in the United States wherein, “The working class... is no longer a cohesive group with a common culture and tradition.”¹²⁸ They explicitly deny the notion that the working class is industrial laborers as they argue that “We do not believe in socialist strategies that concentrate on a ‘key’ sector of the working class to ‘lead’ the revolution. This only intensifies the existing divisions within that class.”¹²⁹

In their initial section on Sexism, NAM argues that “Sexism has served two functions in capitalist society: it is an ideological image for all relationships of power as well as a means of

¹²⁶ “Revised Draft Political Statement,” TAM.051, Box 3, 1972 Founding Convention Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

enforcing the marginal, surplus and unpaid position of women workers in the labor force.”¹³⁰

They continue,

The family, as it now exists, is a center of production and consumption under capitalism and is a chief source of oppression for all people in society—women, children, old people, and gay people in particular... Women and gay people can be expected to have the best understanding of their oppression and the greatest fortitude in fighting against it. From this awareness has grown the autonomous women’s and gay’s movements. We in NAM support these movements that share our analysis on these issues, and we are cognizant of our indebtedness to these movements for raising the humanizing aspect of the revolutionary struggle in our consciousness.¹³¹

This statement appears to offer an initial combination of both Johnson’s and Somers’ work on women and capitalism as well as Coyle’s and Guinn’s writing on gay movements and NAM. That is, this perspective adopts an understanding of capitalist oppression that allows for the insights of autonomous movements and demands that they be integrated into an analysis of capitalism. The statement concludes with a consideration of NAM’s current state, predominantly representing members who have “been to college and are currently working as ‘white collar’ or ‘blue collar’ workers”¹³² and further, they specifically acknowledge their lacking membership from Third World groups.

Through the four-day convention, the sexism section of the statement would be revised to much more substantially align with Johnson’s and Somers’ analysis of sexism and capitalism. The conference agenda included a full day of proceedings under the title of “Sexual Politics Day.” This day began with a plenary “panel on sexual politics. Women, men, gay & straight,” followed by mixed small group discussions and caucusing discussing sexual politics more

¹³⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹³¹ Ibid, 5.

¹³² Ibid, 9.

thoroughly as well as a “program workshops” section for “a discussion of program in light of sexual politics.”¹³³ This agenda demonstrates the importance of the Minneapolis NAM proposal for the conference, nearly all of their agenda items were adopted.

The conference also resulted in the formation of the “NAM Women’s Caucus,” and a NAM Women’s Newsletter was started. This newsletter was envisioned as an “opportunity to share political discussion” and would address the work of individual chapters, ways they have experienced and engaged sexism, their relationships to autonomous women’s movements and ways chapters have developed a theoretical orientation or acted on their perspectives.¹³⁴ From what I can tell, these newsletters would involve collective work from many chapters, although those in North Carolina were intimately involved in their early production and circulation. As I will delve into in the next section, these newsletters would promote a continued discussion of socialist feminism within NAM and reflect a commitment to continue the work begun at the Minneapolis Convention.

Of additional note, this conference marks the first time I have seen NAM refer to itself as a socialist feminist organization, a term that is frequently cited as coming out of later movements in the 1970s.¹³⁵ The statement would eventually begin, “The New American Movement is attempting to develop an analysis of the oppression of women and sexism that synthesizes the insights of the feminist and socialist movement in order to better understand the relationship between class and sexual oppression. This statement begins that analysis by

¹³³ “NAM Founding Convention Agenda,” TAM.051, Box 3, 1972 Founding Convention Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹³⁴ “NAM Women’s Newsletter—November, 1972,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹³⁵ See for example, Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 5th edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

placing the pre-capitalist sexual division of labor in the broader context of sexual division of production and thus in the current capitalist mode of production.”¹³⁶ Their turn towards “the sexual division of production” closely mirrors my discussion of Johnson’s and Somers’ work and further, offered NAM an opportunity to connect the otherwise separate understandings of oppression under capitalism and under patriarchy. As they note, “NAM seeks to integrate the struggle for the liberation of women with the struggle for socialism; basic to this is the idea that women are central, not auxiliary, to the revolutionary class struggle since their role is central to production. Our struggle will be based in overcoming the sexual division of production which is at the root of the split between the home and the outside workplace and determines the specific form that sexist social relations have taken under capitalism.”¹³⁷ The notion of women as central to the revolutionary class struggle offers an important contrast, as I have previously discussed, to many socialist organizations that sought to maintain a class-based understanding of socialism that considered women’s positions without substantially addressing its implications for the larger socialist movement. Indeed, this issue would come up directly at the 1975 National Socialist Convention, which I discuss further at the end of this chapter.

To conclude with NAM’s statement on sexism, I would like to point out that unlike the original draft statement, which addressed autonomous gay movements and women’s movements specifically, the revised and adopted statement notes,

[a]s sexuality must be a free choice for all people, we will demand that all women gain control over their bodies... While a strategy for the liberation of women must be integral to a socialist movement, the experience of male dominance and the unique position of women in society may lead women to choose to struggle in an independent women’s or

¹³⁶ “Revised Draft on Sexism,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

gay feminist movement. NAM supports such movements—as well as autonomous women’s groups and chapters within NAM—that will struggle for the liberation of women and continue to critique the socialist movement itself even as it give that movement vitality and direction¹³⁸

Interestingly here, in contrast to Coyle’s invocation of “sexual politics” in his earlier work and writing, the perspective on sexism adopted by NAM in 1972 almost exclusively focused on implications for women, and particularly straight women. Indeed, as would be raised later, the notion of organizing around women’s work in the household is the result of a particular conception of women that is white, married, and straight. Although they leave room for the experiences of lesbian women in their conclusion, their analysis seems to leave little space for them. My sense of this statement is that, while some asserted the need to link socialist feminism to sexuality, there was a much more robust discussion of (straight) socialist feminist perspectives while sexuality, at this point, was considered on somewhat separate terms.

In addition to a statement on sexism, a statement on “Gaysexuality & Oppression” was adopted. This perspective seems to generally align with Coyle’s speech at Davenport, which I discussed more extensively in my previous chapter. This section begins by contextualizing 1972 in relation to Stonewall and experiences of gay oppression in terms of the law, physical assaults and police brutality, and lack of job security. The statement argues that, “the cumulative effect of this oppression is to make gay people alienated from not only others but from themselves. Gay people are forced to question their very identities, stifle in themselves feelings of love and affection for members of the same sex, and remain ‘in the closet’, concealing their full

¹³⁸ Ibid.

gaysexuality.”¹³⁹ This account of alienation offers an important shift in socialist perspectives as I have discussed them thus far. Here, NAM treats “gaysexuality” as an alienated aspect of life under capitalism. I read this statement as a claim that “full gaysexuality” can only be experienced through socialist revolution. That is, under capitalism, while gay people exist, their sexual experiences remain partially unknown to themselves. In this construction, “gaysexuality” becomes a goal of liberation, rather than simply a product of capitalism. This perspective directly contrasts the common socialist perspective, adopted by groups such as the Socialist Workers Party where gayness is treated as a product of “bourgeois decadence” that will go away with the revolution.

Building on this statement, NAM argues that “in order to fight sexism, we cannot limit ourselves to a narrow fight for rights or self-interest; but we must commit ourselves to the development of an analysis which relates sexuality to class struggle and which includes an awareness of psyching repression in people’s daily lives... Gay socialists must join other sectors within the work force in saying: ‘We cannot make revolution alone, but there can be no real revolution without us!’”¹⁴⁰ Here, NAM rejects reformism alone as a possibility for gay liberation, that is, changing the law will not produce liberation, rather they identify the struggle for liberation as one that is also anti-capitalist. Although I will discuss this further in my epilogue, it is worth noting that this perspective poses an important challenge not only to socialists and gay liberationists in the 1970s, but also to political organizing our present. Across both the sexism and the gaysexuality statements I would like to re-emphasize the importance NAM placed on

¹³⁹ “Section on Gaysexuality & Oppression,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

working with autonomous organizations and the important role autonomous organizing insights played in the early history of NAM.

Thanksgiving 1972: “the first women’s conference on feminism and socialism in the history of the world (to our knowledge)”

The first publication of the NAM Women’s Newsletter in November of 1972, only a few months after the Minneapolis Convention, included an announcement for the 1972 “National Women’s Conference” which would take place over Thanksgiving of the same year. The Conference was organized by the Charlotte Perkins Gillman Chapter of NAM (C. P. Gillman), based in North Carolina, this chapter was entirely made up of women. The existence of all women’s chapters within NAM seems to speak to both the issues NAM continued to face with sexism, particularly from men within the organization, and also to NAM’s commitment to engaging feminism within their organization. As their 1972 statement on sexism notes, “NAM supports such movements—as well as autonomous women’s groups and chapters within NAM.”¹⁴¹ Thus, NAM considered groups like the C. P. Gillman chapter as an “autonomous women’s group” within their organization which highlights the autonomy individual chapters were able to attain under NAM.

The C.P. Gilman Chapter, formed in 1972, specifically identifies its roots in women’s liberation groups, and saw NAM as a point of possibility for addressing their experiences within socialist and women’s liberation organizations. They note, “When the New American Movement formed, with roots in both socialist and feminist movements, we saw a chance to

¹⁴¹ “NAM Women’s Newsletter,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

form a group where we could assert our dual identities. We wanted to be part of a socialist movement, yet we did not want to leave off our commitment to the women's movement."¹⁴²

Contributors to the first issue of the newsletter included many of the figures I have previously discussed. The issue appears to have been arranged by Roberta Lynch and Judy MacLean out of Pittsburgh, both of whom had been essential to forwarding a feminist perspective in NAM. Minneapolis NAM Women discussed both their experiences of frustration about women's lack of priority in national issues but also detailed their excitement and exhaustion in finding ways to collectively organize women. Indeed, they also note a strong desire to create a women's union in Minneapolis as an impetus they note the potential of a women's union to end "the present fragmentation of the women's movement in Minneapolis," while they also maintain concerns about how this might impact their NAM chapter. Further, they cite the work of the "radical women's liberation union in Chicago," likely the CWLU, which also had and would continue to have significant involvement in NAM, as a model for their work.

The Mad River Chapter also submitted the results of their caucus discussions, which focused on how to improve women's roles in their chapter, and how to combat sexism coming from male members. In contrast to considering only an autonomous relationship to male members, they detailed the small gains they were able to achieve, concluding, "our relationships go up and down. But we've begun to deal with sexism."¹⁴³

Turning to the conference itself, as Sara Evans, a former NAM member herself who was in attendance, describes the 1972 conference in her book *Tidal Wave* as follows,

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

In standard student movement fashion, 165 women heard about it through the movement grapevine, drove hundreds of miles to get there (oblivious to the holiday weekend they were missing), slept on floors, ate peanut butter, and debated earnestly with one another for several days. Most of them were unaffiliated with any formal group but they returned home to organize. Soon, in addition to the women's unions and Bread and Roses there were a number of Marxist-feminist discussion groups and several all women's chapters of the New American Movement¹⁴⁴

Further, she adds in a footnote later in the text, "Perhaps the most important of these ["influential theoretical discussion papers"] was a paper by Peggy Somers and Kathryn Johnson that challenged the place of 'reproduction' in classical Marxism, arguing that reproduction was coequal with the sphere of production..."¹⁴⁵ As I have already centrally considered the importance of Somers' and Johnson's paper to NAM's political platform, I would like to address some of the work of other conference attendees as they specifically addressed gay liberation.

From the Personal is Political to the Political is Personal: Lesbianism & Socialist Feminism

Through workshop meeting notes, it appears that 14 women in attendance identified as "not straight." In a "gay liberation group," discussions centered discomfort over the cliques and power struggles that existed in the women's movement.¹⁴⁶ The notes suggest that the discussion itself, among 20 women, faced the same issues, as they note, "due to the largeness of the group, and the feelings of being inhibited, we decided to break up into groups, and never rejoined." Further, from the presentations that were compiled in a 1972 newsletter, only one speech specifically addressed lesbian experiences and theorizing within socialist feminism. Judy Henderson, in the speech, "On Integrating the Personal and Political," took up the question of

¹⁴⁴ Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 161.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 272 n97.

¹⁴⁶ "NAM Women's Newsletter" TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women's Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

lesbianism within the perspective laid out by Somers and Johnson, namely a call to reject and work towards the dismantling of the separation of the political and personal. Her perspective, a way to foster unity in decision making and discussion, would be essential to the form and function of other NAM women's chapter meetings going forward.

Henderson begins her speech with some of the hallmarks of women's liberation rhetoric, namely a displacement of authority and an openness to collective discussion and criticism. As her first line begins, "I want to say that part of what will be going on up here for me is that my voice will probably shake and it will be a struggle for me to speak sometimes..."¹⁴⁷ This frame shapes much of her perspective which seeks to connect emotional and quasi-individual experiences of alienated life under capitalism to a systemic analysis of oppression and a view of the promise of liberation. As she continues, "In other words, my thinking on this is important and exciting to me, and I'm making this hypothetical model out of it, but it might sound to you like a lot of dogmatic generalization about what your own experience is. So I want to say right now that is not what I am trying to do." Coming out of radical psychological theories at the time, Henderson's approach works towards an alternative conception of the political and personal, through her experiences as a lesbian, in order to link socialist perspectives to women's liberation perspectives,

I want to show you how resolving the dichotomy of personal/political resulted in a radical, liberating reorganization of my political thinking and self-concept, how it conceptually and emotionally refocused and synthesized my fragmented experience. I will talk about lesbianism as the prime example of this new integration for me, and then I want to show how the continuing integration of the person and political leads to even deeper concepts about the make-up of people than sexism can provide. I'll keep

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

pointing out how I think faulty political analysis and methods have maintained a fragmentation of experience in the left, and ideas about how to change that.¹⁴⁸

As Henderson suggests, she seeks to draw on her own experiences of coming to consciousness in terms of her experiences of fragmentation within Leftist circles. I am most concerned here with how Henderson reconfigures the personal and the political towards an understanding of theory based in lived experience and feeling.

She begins with a description of her experiences of fragmentation in socialist circles, arguing that their politics have produced “the reduction of social reality to the generalized concepts of ‘laborer,’ ‘capitalist,’ ‘classes,’ and ‘revolutionary’” and further, she argues that the New Left, and SDS, modes of organizing, particularly among white student activists, adopt a model of “violent demonstrations” as a “remorseless drive” rooted in shame about their comparatively higher class status. That is, she was turned off to socialist organizations because “self-chastisement” and “self-sacrifice” “underlay the word ‘revolutionary’” for them. Thus, in place of processing personal issues and experiences under capitalism, she finds that these “revolutionaries” merely externalize their personal shame through violence.

On the other hand, she points to how the women’s movement made “personal weaknesses to be legitimized as valid political issues.” While Henderson felt that women’s liberation work allowed space for her own experiences to be heard and considered, she notes,

But the man in the factory was left standing there. All that the Women’s Movement added to the possibilities of that interaction was a new category to see him as in, ‘male chauvinist’ as well as ‘Laborer’ which only accomplished a stronger sense of contradiction in my approach to him. It did nothing at all really to create insight for me or him into what personal issues of his might be politically relevant, and how they would then relate to any concept of him as an oppressed worker or a sexist.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Again, she argues that caricatures of men as the “workers” for socialists, and “chauvinists” for the women’s movement, continually fail to acknowledge and address men’s alienation from their own emotions and experiences. In this context, she argues that, “Theory should be felt as a process of trying to see what’s there, not as an aim towards rigid hierarchies of notions which experience must then be jammed into.” Matching NAM’s consistent perspective that socialist feminism is not the domain of exclusively women, she argues that men must also be seen as human, “finding men solely responsible for all the corruption of humanity to such an extent that men become dismissed as people to work with, people with feelings, or people capable of warm human sexuality.” This point, that a mixed organization is necessary for the liberation of all people then opens space for her to argue that theory must be felt personally and align with personal experience. She continues,

What [theory] does mean is that any ideological text whether it’s Marx or Wordsworth, needs to be continually interpreted on terms of complex individual experience to have any meaning, and that I think there are ways to find channels from the text down into people on such personal terms that they can, by themselves, break out of whatever is limiting their own perceptual schema. That is the crux of politicization to me...¹⁵⁰

In this sense, Henderson begins to point towards the necessity of re-evaluating all theory in relation to people’s beliefs and perspectives. That is, that the political must be felt personally for it to have value in building a larger movement. Henderson then seeks to extend Somers’ and Johnson’s essay. She argues that their work, “gave me the conceptual push I needed to crystalize a new way of thinking about myself and others politically so that I could feel politically located and feel wholly myself there.” For her, their work allowed space for particular

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

experiences to be extended into socialist thought. Further, it made “emotional intimacy, procreation, childrearing, and handing down of cultural norms... as a center of important labor and important social control.” So, while Somers and Johnson did not specifically address sexuality in their writing, it opened up the potential for sexuality to be considered both within the sphere of production and the sphere of reproduction.

Henderson introduces the function of “alternative gay lifestyles” as both a sign that cultural norms are not universal and as a starting point for considering the possibilities of forging an alternative set of social relationships, one that cannot be realized without ending capitalist modes of family organization. She points to how “Gay couples are living examples of how artificial the roles are since in their home and work styles both members are forced to assume responsibilities ordinarily attributed to the other sex.”¹⁵¹ Thus Henderson’s turn on lived experience recenters the personal as the basis for understanding life under capitalism, that is that individual fears, attachments to the status quo, are what need to be overcome in order to build a struggle that allows individuals to feel wholly themselves. She notes that “Any woman’s particular complex experience of terror at what she would give up by allowing herself to love another woman is the meat of what determines her away from these alternatives, is the key to a network of fears and hopes interwoven with self-concept that keeps her tied to the institutionalized roles of capitalism.”¹⁵²

Further, Henderson asserts that theory that cannot explain personal experience has no value, “It seems alright to listen with our own analysis of what someone’s values and

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

socialization could have been to make her/his experience, as stated, understandable to us. But where the analysis distorts the experience, the analysis must be wrong, wrong even for thinking about someone, let alone talking to her or him.”¹⁵³ And Henderson advocates for an approach that would open space for all to share their personal experiences and feelings as part of the production of theory. Within an organizational meeting, her model argues for giving space for each member at the meeting to share fully their feelings up to that point, and further, she advocates for a mode of listening for all other members that would allow grievances to be aired. Through this process, a group would be able to come to a more genuine sense of unity, one that is based in collective understanding and concern, rather than one that asserts a particular perspective as the only approach.

Henderson’s speech was apparently well received with a NAM member noting to the NIC, “it is an excellent paper which dares to question much in present women’s & mixed movements, gay and straight.”¹⁵⁴ In a collective statement from the C.P. Gilman Chapter, they address shifts in the group over the last year, since their conference. This article argues that the Durham Conference marked a point of coming together for the organization, as they were forced to enact their previous discussions. Further, they discuss the essential role Judy Henderson’s presentation played in their group as they moved forward. Building on her work which “outlined some techniques for ensuring that group unity was based on the felt and expressed ideas of everyone,”¹⁵⁵ they argue that these techniques opened up their organization

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “NAM NIC Meeting, 1973,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM 73 NIC Meetings Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁵⁵ “C.P. Gilman Chapter Report,” TAM.051, Box 4, NAM Women’s Newsletter Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

to genuinely collective discussion and action. It appears that lesbianism specifically marked a divide in their organizing that had not come up until Henderson's model was enacted. "In Gilman, our group unity was being undermined by the fact that we had never explored together the experiences that had made each of us turn to socialist feminism. We did not really know what each individual expected from the group or how each individual felt at the conclusion of a meeting."¹⁵⁶ Enacting a bottom-up mode of organizing, and explicitly rejecting the notion that there was a single perspective that must be held for unity, the Gilman Chapter sought to build a collective understanding out of individual experience, creating political struggles through personal experience.

As they continue, they address how sexuality specifically had divided their group, "We realized we were not meeting individual needs when we met to discuss lesbianism and the special needs of lesbian women. Many of us in some very different ways were threatened by this question: how to deal with lesbianism politically, how to deal with it personally, and how any one of us felt individually." By following Henderson's process of listening and giving space for "each person to express how she was feeling," the chapter found that

the feelings and 'cleared air' resulting from that meeting represented a real turning point for our group. We were all intensely involved in listening to each other and in expressing our feelings—for perhaps the first time as a group. As Judy had pointed out, 'participatory listening,' with every member contributing equally, is very time consuming, but it is a tremendous energy-producing phenomenon... It was our feeling that we had to turn inward, reflecting on the way our group functioned, determining a mechanism for involving new members and formulating a strategy of work that incorporated our new ideas on discipline and personal expression¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

This statement marks the integral role a lesbian perspective brought to socialist feminism, it allowed the chapter to speak with and to each other towards a goal of unity, without any presumptions about the status of that unity. Through listening, the chapter built unity by clearing the air, rather than asserting dogmatic principles.

The 1972 conference also resulted in a growing interest in NAM in the Chapel Hill area, with many of the women who attended encountering NAM for the first time. As Melissa Upton's report after would note, "We had been very timid about 'pushing' NAM at the conference, very influenced by our own negative experiences with sects that manipulate. So, we never even had planned to introduce NAM! So everyone kept asking What's NAM? When are we gonna talk about it? So we changed the agenda and had a very good exchange on Sunday..."¹⁵⁸

After the Conference

In June of 1973, the C.P. Gilman Chapter published a 3rd issue of the "NAM women's newsletter."¹⁵⁹ With articles from Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Kentucky, and North Carolina, the newsletter marked a continued growth of active conversation and organizing around socialist feminism. Of particular interest to me is the continued emphasis women in NAM placed on collective organizing and modes of group engagement.

In an article from three members of the Lexington Kentucky NAM Chapter, they discuss their role in a "socialist-feminist study group, fondly known as the 'Red Star Sisters.'" This study group consisted of members from the Kentucky Women's Political Caucus, women in "Gay

¹⁵⁸ "NAM NIC Meeting, 1973," TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

¹⁵⁹ "NAM Women's Newsletter" TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

Liberation, People's Party, Welfare Rights, YSA, Peace Council, University Council on Women's concerns." In this sense, while the study group itself worked across a number of sectarian and political divides, a shared interest in integrating socialist and feminist thought pervaded. The NAM members discuss the form and function of the group with an emphasis on challenging themselves to have free, if structured, discussion. They note, "The necessity for a chairwoman was not apparent at first. The need to become evident only when we realized that each week we were expecting and awaiting leadership from the same woman—one we generally considered to be more knowledgeable than ourselves. We discovered ourselves falling into traditional pupil/teacher roles." Further, they continue to emphasize the feeling of theory in their group,

Having shared the woman's movement experience, and now joining again with women to delve into socialist 'theory', something seems to be missing. The dynamism, the originality, and spontaneity—the personal touch which was so alive for us in strictly women's issues—seems to recede in our Marxist discussions and the group takes on a classroom aura that leaves us often disappointed after the meetings... But as women, we hope to offer more than a new perspective to socialism, we hope to offer alternative ways of approaching socialist theory—new ways of being and doing which can make the experience as well as the understanding of socialism more personal... Until we find or create a socialism that offers a critique of more than the socio-economic issues on an intellectual basis we will continue feeling somehow dissatisfied. And we know that what we are feeling is closer to the problem of integrating socialism and feminism than any material we read or any discussion we have.¹⁶⁰

In this excerpt, the tensions between the personal and political are extended to a divide between theory and experience, wherein the 3 NAM sisters argue that classical Marxist thought is unable to address and raise the same personal feelings that they had found in feminist thought. And by positioning this concern as the stakes of socialist feminism, they suggest, much

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

like Judy Henderson, that the ability to process the feelings of theory are necessary for the production of alternative approaches to socialism, beyond classical Marxism.

Laying the ground for a 1975 National Socialist Feminist Conference

In a later newsletter from 1973, the necessity of a turn to action, in addition to ensuring internal group unity, solidified for NAM socialist feminists. Through both individual chapter reports, and a set of meeting notes from the Women's Caucus of the NIC, NAM women argued that a political platform and project was a necessary direction from the theoretical and internal work that had occupied the chapters. The Iowa City chapter and Women's Caucus on one hand demonstrate the concrete work members have performed through NAM, specifically university union organizing, developing a Rape Crisis Line, and leading and supporting other local groups. Further, they argue that their Women's Caucus is not intended to be a political action group, rather they identify it as an opportunity for "building our strength."¹⁶¹

A member of Minneapolis' NAM chapter, in contrast, argues that socialist feminists are in an important place for building a women's movement that extends beyond the middle-class women that largely served as a face for the autonomous women's movement. She notes, "It is unlikely that either the ideological or the psychological effort required to do this work is to be found elsewhere in the current women's movement. It seems to be the programmatic work cut out for us." She also notes that their programmatic agenda is turning to "a struggle against the rising food prices" in the cities. They tie this issue to both women's specific role in production and to a larger issue for all members of society as a result of inflation.

¹⁶¹ "NAM Women's Newsletter—1973," TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

Similarly, the NIC meeting in 1973 focused on the function of socialist feminism within NAM. Across 6 members, they argue that “we need to develop national and local women’s programs” noting, “Our chapter’s problem is that there are many women in the area who share an ideology but we have no specific program to work on together.” One member notes that “in my actual work I was just a good old socialist comrade like in the 30s and 40s... in terms of work—political work—it didn’t seem to make a bit of difference.” This argument, that while socialist feminism had shifted internal processes and perspectives, it had not changed the political program they engaged, would develop further in the coming year. They also grappled with their redefined notion of the working class, “I sense the expanded working class theory has been very difficult to use. I’m thinking of working class women as those for whom survival is paramount.” That is, just as the opportunity and excitement of NAM’s ability to create an American socialist feminism produced possibilities, these possibilities had to be reflected upon in relation to their ability to create action and build a movement that could address its constituency.¹⁶²

NAM’s 3rd Annual Convention, in July of 1974, “Strategies for the Workplace,” sought to build on their successes in organizing an impeachment campaign against Nixon earlier in the year and sought to confront the status of a political platform for the organization. With regard to the political platform, tensions between the work of local chapters and national leadership arose once again, as did an explosion of work on both socialist feminism and gay liberation.

At the convention, the C.P. Gilman chapter sought to create a “Feminist Caucus” that would explicitly deal with programmatic aspects in NAM. They note that

¹⁶² Ibid.

we were so excited by the theoretical advances within NAM and by the socialist-feminist conference we sponsored two years ago that we have not struggled forcefully for our feminist politics within NAM. Most of the time we have felt accepted but somewhat lonely as feminists within NAM. Many women in NAM have looked to us for leadership of a kind which we have not and cannot provide. We cannot be the embodiment of socialist feminism in NAM... The fact is, of course, that there is lots of support for socialist-feminism within NAM, but it is unorganized.¹⁶³

They go on to argue that as it stands, the role of women's caucuses is to address women's experiences and these meetings are an opportunity to get to know each other thus, "it is unrealistic to expect the women's caucus to be the political instrument of socialist-feminism within NAM." A feminist caucus in contrast "would unabashedly push for this particular political development within NAM and would welcome and try to stimulate the kind of discussion about socialist feminism that has gone on in the whole organization within the last few months." This caucus was accepted into NAM and further, a plan for a second National Socialist Feminist Conference was mandated, and tentatively scheduled for the Spring of 1975. At the NIC meetings in August and October of 1974, the plans for the conference were tentatively to focus on "program and strategy" and further, there was consideration of it centering "Women in the economy."¹⁶⁴

Within the Men's Caucus, there was a discussion of David Fernbach's "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation," which was published in July of 1973. Fernbach's argument hinges on a notion of homosexuality that is not a threat to a capitalist system and thus, gay people must turn to the Left and Marxist organizing as an opportunity to build the gay liberation movement. At the caucus meeting, some participants took issue with Fernbach's

¹⁶³ "Feminist Caucus Proposal" TAM.051, Box 3, 1974 Convention Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

conception and maintained an argument that that “homosexuality was a threat to the nuclear family, which remains the agent for the reproduction of labor power.” In this sense, they offer an extension of Somers’ and Johnson’s work, which as I discussed, argues that women’s oppression in the private sphere can be understood through the family. Further, they argue that homosexuality poses a threat to the growing conservatism in the US, and thus extends to both public and private spheres of reproduction while maintaining that rights-based struggles are not a source of liberation.¹⁶⁵

While much of the convention’s proceedings centered building an explicit program, the NIC noted that this was the first time “the membership shared a recognition of a need for a program (tactic) to be rooted in a theory or strategy.” In this sense, the conference appeared to tip the scale on a need for more explicit national organizing theory, rather than having a leadership with a more limited focus. The results of this experience would be the base for the production of yearly plans at the coming national conventions.

1975 National Socialist/Feminist Conference

The proposal for the 1975 National Socialist/Feminist Conference was circulated by three chapters of NAM, Mad River, C.P. Gilman, and Fox River Valley. The proposal argues that 1975 marked a moment of renewed militancy among women as “the women’s movement is becoming increasingly de-politicized.”¹⁶⁶ Further they argue that “as socialist-feminists in a national organization we have an opportunity to unify these emerging forces,” thus they felt that this conference would offer necessary support to building a nation-wide coalitional

¹⁶⁵ “NAM NIC Meeting, 1973,” TAM.051, New American Movement Records.

¹⁶⁶ “National Socialist/Feminist Conference Proposal,” TAM.051, Box 3, 1974 Convention Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

struggle through socialist feminism. As they discussed, “The goals are to encourage talk of socialist-feminism, to build a socialist-feminist theory, to raise socialism in the feminist movement. A communications network--not an organization.” Eventually, the national planning committee for the conference would include the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, the Boston Socialist/Feminist Organization, the Twin Cities Women’s Union, the Valley Women’s Union (MA), the NAM Women’s Caucus, represented by the Dayton Socialist/Feminist Group, the C.P. Gilman Chapter of NAM, and Radical Women (Seattle).

Along with circulating initial invitations to socialist feminist organizations that may want to join the conference steering committee, Third World members of the steering committee would also send out letters specifically encouraging third world women to attend. As part of their justification for the creation of a Third World Caucus at the event, they note that “it is probably no surprise to anyone that there are few Third World women involved in the Socialist-Feminist movement.” Indeed, NAM itself faced persistent issues with the whiteness of their organization, while maintaining some local connections to Third World organizations, such as the Black Panthers in Berkeley. As the statement continues, they argue “In addition to addressing the relationship between the oppression of Third World women and the Socialist-Feminist movement, we also want to emphasize the vital leadership role of Third World women in the Socialist -Feminist movement, and to point out that the feminist and the gay movements as well as the Third World movements are inseparable from the Socialist Movements... Revolution will only be accomplished through the united struggle and resources of all oppressed people, and our theory and actions must be united with class, race, and sex

struggles.”¹⁶⁷ Although, as shown here, a central goal of the conference was to bring together socialist feminist perspectives towards unity and collective struggle, the conference, as the Combahee River Collective Statement suggests, would do little to unify socialist feminists.

As Judith Ezekiel would describe it, “One Berkeley socialist feminist wrote that the conference resulted in ‘a growing confusion rather than clarity and unity about what socialist feminism is.’”¹⁶⁸ Further, in opening the event to all women interested in socialist feminism, the conference was inundated with attendees, with approximately two thousand seeking to attend and four hundred being asked to leave. As the planning committee would state in their welcome information, “The response to the conference has been overwhelming. The fact that over 2000 women wanted to participate is really exciting but has caused some logistical problems. Unfortunately hundreds of women have been turned away.”¹⁶⁹ Another attendee interviewed by Ezekiel would note “The conference was ‘like a hundred different conferences happening at the same time... it was exhilarating; it was wonderful; it was terrible.’”¹⁷⁰ In particular, although NAM and many women’s unions sought to avoid sectarian infighting, this conference, an effort to seek unity, would also be interrupted by socialist organizations, such as the Spartacist League, who did not support socialist feminism but distributed pamphlets at the conference anyway. While for Ezekiel, in her history of women’s organizing in Dayton, the conference marked the beginning of a downturn in socialist feminist groups in the city, in terms of NAM’s larger efforts to address sexuality and socialist feminism, the conference seems to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ezekiel, 154.

¹⁶⁹ “Welcome!” TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁷⁰ Ezekiel, 153.

mark a new beginning. Exemplifying this new beginning was the publication of NAM's *Working Papers on Socialist Feminism* which begin, "The interaction of the women's movement and the left in America has raised a number of crucial questions for both movements, including the role of gay people in the movement, the importance of involving working class and minority women at the center of the fight for liberation, and the necessity of fighting sexism on all fronts, personal and public, in the home and in the wage labor market, economically and politically."¹⁷¹

While the conference hosted a wide variety of workshops and panels, I am most interested here in the work of NAM members at the conference and work that centered sexuality specifically in relation to socialist feminism. The most commented on aspect of the event within NAM would be Barbara Ehrenreich's speech on socialist feminism in the left. Ehrenreich was a NAM member at the time and, as I mentioned, would continue to play an important role in socialist feminist theorizing through to today. But importantly with respect to my next chapter, members of the "CWLU Lesbian Workgroup," and most notably Chris Riddiough, were also in attendance at the conference and would soon become a chapter of NAM. Riddiough spoke on a lesbian panel centering "lesbian organizing from a Socialist-Feminist perspective."¹⁷²

At the conference, the Lesbian Caucus published a majority-approved statement on lesbianism and socialist feminism. In their statement, they begin with a critique of the conference, "As Lesbians, we have felt dissatisfied with the way in which we and our politics

¹⁷¹ *Working Papers on Socialist Feminism*, TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁷² "Conference Agenda," TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

have been dealt with at this conference. We feel that the lack of comprehension of the realities and politics of Lesbianism which has been displayed in the political discussions thus far is the result of a deeper failure of the conference—the failure to realize the dream and the necessity of developing a true socialist feminist perspective.”¹⁷³ They continue by critiquing both socialists and feminists arguing that while classical Marxism does not take sex seriously as a category, feminism also fails to take class seriously. Thus they argue that “we need a movement which recognizes and fights to abolish all of the sources of human degradation, be they racism, sexism, capitalism, imperialism, or fascism. We need a movement which will articulate socialist politics within the women’s movement, feminist politics within the left.”¹⁷⁴ In placing a lesbian socialist feminism in relation to a number of struggles, this statement seems to align with both the earlier work of Brian Coyle, as I discussed in chapter one, and also with the larger conference goal of building unity within socialist feminism. However, as they continue, they show that their own unity as a caucus does not necessarily mirror the experiences of many at the conference. “This conference can only touch the surface of our struggle as we come from every position on the continuum—that is to say we range from super-Lesbian Feminists to super Socialists. We have come together finally saying that we must deal with each other, we must work with each other, and we need each other.” Finally, they conclude with six points “that the Socialist Feminist movement must deal with if it is to consider itself a true movement of liberation.” The list reads as follows:

1. The socialist-feminist movement must devote as much time to a critique of the mode of reproduction as to the mode of production. We must examine and criticize all forms of

¹⁷³ “Lesbianism & Socialist Feminism,” TAM.051, Box 4, Socialist Feminism Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

the family... Yet we recognize that many Lesbians live in a family structure and that the family, moreover; has served as a haven for the people of many oppressed groups. But we must re-evaluate alternatives to this haven and the reasons why it is the only option for many women.

2. As Lesbian Socialist Feminists, we have rejected patriarchy and heterosexual privilege...
3. There are race and class distinctions among lesbians, and many lesbian sisters suffer multiple oppressions. We respect and support the right of our Third World Sisters to define their priorities and work within their liberation struggles.
4. The right of lesbian mothers to raise their own children must be recognized and fought for by all.
5. Ageism, another division among us, has not been adequately addressed at this conference or in our movement...
6. The relationship of Lesbians to various aspects of the revolutionary struggle was not brought out by this conference. We need to explore how we as Lesbians relate to Third World struggles, and the total movement for a worldwide socialist society. As well, our sisters in all liberation struggles must come to a fuller awareness of homosexual oppression and understand that our struggle is theirs.¹⁷⁵

As this list of issues suggests, members of the Lesbian Caucus at the conference sought to intimately connect their experiences as lesbians to a socialist feminism. And yet, they argue that the conference failed to provide space for this. They also maintain a commitment to wider liberation struggles and seek to develop their own perspective through those other autonomous movements. While the conference itself may not have offered the space for these answers, as many had hoped, NAM's next convention, less than a month later in August of 1975, would see these issues brought to the fore of the organization.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out an organizational history of NAM's approaches to socialist feminism and lesbianism between 1972 and 1975. I have pointed towards the wide range of individuals and organizations that influenced NAM's perspective, and I have addressed the variety of dispersed writings and work by NAM members that sought to understand socialist

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

feminism. Additionally, I took up the specific failures and successes NAM members had in integrating sexuality into their socialist feminism. As a whole, the mid-1970s marked an important moment of growth for NAM, as Judith Gardiner would state in 2010, referring to 1976, “NAM was then at the mid-point of its eleven-year career from 1971 to 1982 and at a high point in public recognition and organizational success just as U.S. socialist feminism achieved its greatest prominence as a strand within the feminist movement.”¹⁷⁶ Essentially for my next chapter, I also noted that programmatic aspects of NAM’s agenda were becoming a pressing issue for the organization. As NAM would continue into 1976, a greater emphasis would be placed on specific programming and continuing to synthesize sexuality in relation to socialist feminism.

¹⁷⁶ Gardiner, “Ambitious Moderation,” 49–66.

Chapter Three

Gay Liberation in NAM: 1975-1980

If the growth in NAM's discussions of Socialist Feminism came to the fore through the National Socialist Feminist Conference in 1975, the latter part of the 1970s marked the rise of a sustained conversation about the various approaches to socialist feminism that had arisen over the previous five years. Additionally, 1975 marked a substantial return of gay and lesbian engagements with NAM's theory and practices.

This chapter begins with the months after the National Socialist Feminist Conference and covers the next five years of NAM's work on socialist feminism and gay and lesbian liberation. This period marked a coming together of NAM's perspective and actions through the growth of stronger national leadership laying out "one year plans" specifically seeking to align theory with practice. However, 1976 also resulted in a number of members from various perspectives posing challenges to NAM's approaches, namely the rise of a Marxist-Leninist (M-L) tendency within the organization and critiques of NAM on an organizational level for failures to genuinely engage socialist feminists and gays and lesbians within their work. In many ways the M-L tendency debate mirrored the early tensions in NAM that I discussed in the first chapter. Similarly, the latter part of the 1970s marked the rise of a democratic socialist perspective within the organization, that would eventually result in their merger with the Democratic Organizing Committee (DSOC). After this tumult, 1977 through 1980 includes some of NAM's most sustained engagements with sexuality and socialism.

The documents I address in this chapter show that the terms of these engagements vacillated between advocating for civil rights for gays and arguing for a revolutionary socialist

perspective on gay liberation. I also argue that this turn to specifically civil rights on one side resulted from working within a larger movement that sought to challenge rising homophobia, exemplified by Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children Campaign," and on the other, aligned with a larger move in NAM towards a democratic socialist perspective that focused on rights-based work and electoral issues. And yet, many NAM members also maintained a revolutionary perspective that sought to extend the issue of gay civil rights into one of building a mass socialist feminist movement. For example, 1979 saw the publication of NAM's *Working Papers of Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism*, a 48-page pamphlet containing six articles that address these movements in relation to one another published by the Blazing Star Chapter of NAM. Additionally, the late 1970s saw the rise of a number of other individuals and groups writing on gay liberation and socialism and NAM's work sought to develop these approaches on their own terms. I begin this chapter by laying out the tensions two NAM members identified in 1974 between Marxist-Leninism, democratic socialism, and NAM's own approach before turning to internal debates between 1975 and 1980 that moved NAM towards a democratic socialist perspective.

Drawing Lines: NAM, Marxist-Leninism, and Democratic Socialism

"NAM—while possessing substantial unity in action—allows diversity of opinions within the organization and is public about its internal differences"¹⁷⁷ -Bob McMahon & Ray Faherty

Bob McMahon and Ray Faherty, two NAM members, circulated a "Brief Survey" of American socialist work in 1974. Their text nicely frames the debates between the Marxist-Leninist (M-L) Caucus, socialist feminists in NAM, and democratic socialists. McMahon and

¹⁷⁷ "The Socialist Left in the United States: A Brief Survey," 16 June 1974, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Faherty note that “the roots of almost all existing socialist organizations [in the US] can be traced to one of three preceding periods of Left activity. Two main categories—democratic socialist and Marxist-Leninist—cover almost all white Left groups. One exception, the New American Movement, does not fit clearly into either camp.”¹⁷⁸ They continue by discussing how democratic socialist groups predominantly focus on support through electoral politics while Marxist-Leninists, “stress unity and discipline... and members are required to present a united front... Most Leninists place primary emphasis on organizing industrial workers, who they see as the most important section of the working class.”¹⁷⁹ In contrast, they argue that the DSOC “favor[s] operating as a kind of socialist pressure group within the Democratic Party to work for political realignment of the two party system in which Democrats would emerge as a clear liberal/left coalition. The base for this coalition would be liberals, the Left, labor and minorities... organization is extremely loose, and membership may mean little beyond paying dues.” In this perspective, seeking rights-based legislative victories would represent a small portion of radicalizing mainstream electoral politics.

With regard to NAM they note that, “A minority within the organization has argued that NAM should copy [democratic socialists] in organizing primarily around an electoral road to socialism. This has been rejected by a strong majority, which does not deny that elections should play a tactical role, but sees NAM functioning as a group of activists, in a fashion somewhat similar to a Leninist cadre. Unlike the Leninists... NAM argues that much of the secrecy of and imposed unity of the Leninist groups was an unfortunate necessity under the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Czarist police, but is inappropriate in the US,” and that “NAM does not see the industrial workers as the main sector of the working class.” As I have more thoroughly discussed in my first and second chapters, NAM socialist feminists had consistently denied that the base of the organization should be industrial laborers since NAM’s inception.

Along these lines, the 1975 debate within NAM’s Women’s Caucus over an M-L perspective or a socialist feminist one would return focus to the base of NAM’s organizing, with questions that asked whether NAM should approach women as laborers or approach women as women. But, over the next four years, NAM would move somewhat closer to the DSOC, and would merge with them in 1982.

NAM’s 4th Annual Convention, Oberlin, OH, 1975

As chapter two concluded with the approaches and concerns of the Lesbian Caucus at the July of 1975 Socialist Feminist Conference, NAM’s next major convention, only one month later in Oberlin, Ohio, would bring to the fore a number of gay and lesbian critiques of NAM’s work. Additionally, these critiques would be especially pressing as NAM sought, for the first time, to lay out a national plan indicating their particular investments for the coming year. Leading up to the convention, in June of 1975, the NIC circulated a convention packet that laid out the key convention topics that would be up for a vote. In place of saving discussion of nationally relevant issues for the convention, NAM began pre-voting within chapters to allow specific time to address questions and concerns without limiting it to full-convention debate. This process, including plans for NIC members to visit all NAM chapters prior to the convention, was narrated as a way to “attempt to safeguard the rights of minorities, while insuring that the

adoption of a strategy is as democratic as possible.”¹⁸⁰ While this effort to continue to build a democratic process was important to the organization, it did not necessarily protect “minorities” on the terms of minority groups themselves.

The Convention issue of NAM’s *Moving On* paper would herald the Oberlin Convention in July of 1975. The convention preface notes that “[i]nternally, there has been more struggle—and probably more growth—than at any time in NAM’s past. We have placed an increased emphasis on developing workplace related activity in the organization and on discussing programs that can make more concrete our commitment to socialist feminism.”¹⁸¹ Further, the preface lays out both the rise of the M-L Caucus and the pressing need to engage socialist feminism in the organization. They juxtapose a note that “the convention will feature a political education session on ‘Should NAM Become a Cadre Organization?’ The panel will particularly attempt to explore the relevance of Leninism for the development of a revolutionary organization in the contemporary U.S.” with a comment on the Women’s and Men’s Caucuses that notes in the next paragraph,

in the past, NAM has tended to de-emphasize issues that relate particularly to women in favor of programs that are directed toward ‘uniting the class’ and involving women and men equally (e.g. utilities) while doing educational work around socialist-feminism. There is a growing move within the organization to change this approach and to stress the importance of organizing women around issues that are of immediate concern to them and that fight against aspects of women’s oppression.¹⁸²

These two approaches seem to offer a clear picture of the tensions facing NAM members heading into the convention. Namely, a concern for creating a united national program that is

¹⁸⁰ “Preconvention Packet,” 30 June 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁸¹ “NAM Convention ’75,” *Moving On* July 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

tempered by the importance of maintaining a specifically socialist feminist approach. That is, while a Leninist cadre approach would demand clear and cohesive programming, I am arguing that it would also write over the socialist feminist perspective that had been theorized thus far in NAM's work, by reasserting the "woman question" that had plagued other socialist organizations at the time. This move, along with a lacking engagement with sexuality at the conference, would force NAM to reckon with its previous and ongoing efforts to relate theory and practice.

NAM members from across the country convened in Oberlin, Ohio from August 6 through August 9. Most centrally for this project, a debate on the role of women in NAM was staged between members of the Durham Organizing Collective, representing the M-L Caucus position, and members of the C.P. Gilman Chapter, representing the socialist feminist perspective I centered in chapter two. Further, members of the Gay Men's Caucus posed essential questions about the place of gay liberation in NAM's work in addition to the ongoing work of an Androgyny Caucus and a Socialist-Feminist Caucus. I begin here with the debate between socialist feminists and Marxist-Leninists in the Women's Caucus meeting before turning to the work of the Gay Men's Caucus, the Androgyny Caucus, and the Socialist-Feminist Caucus.

NAM's Women's Caucus

At the Wednesday evening Women's Caucus meeting, Lucy Wagner spoke on behalf of the Marxist-Leninist (M-L) perspective in a speech titled "Towards a Marxist Theory of Women's Oppression" and Barbara Ehrenreich, a still prominent figure in contemporary US socialism, responded in a speech titled a "Socialist-Feminist Response."

Early on in Lucy Wagner's speech, she challenges the function of socialist feminism, arguing that the "growth of Socialist-Feminism indicates the awareness on the part of many women involved in the women's movement that the struggle for women's liberation must go beyond a struggle for equal rights under capitalism. But Socialist-Feminism is not at this point a revolutionary theory. In fact, there are two theories which call themselves Socialist-Feminist which fundamentally contradict each other."¹⁸³ Wagner continues by asserting the distinction between Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate*.¹⁸⁴ As I have given attention to both of these perspectives in my previous chapter, I am more interested here in approaching the results of Wagner's and Ehrenreich's debate.

In response to Wagner's speech Barbara Ehrenreich built an argument that Wagner's efforts to justify a Marxist approach to women's oppression fails in as much as it "pays lip service to the weaknesses of traditional Marxist theory as well as those of most feminists, but omits any specific critiques of traditional Marxism while it details several critiques of feminists, thus providing an unbalanced review." On the family, Ehrenreich notes that

A line of further investigation we would suggest is to look at the variety of functions the family plays under capitalism (eg as an economic unit in which women and children are dependent on a man's wage, as a center of consumption, as a haven for the unemployed, as a socializer, as the social arena for the expression of emotional needs for warmth and intimacy, etc.). Some of these are vital to capitalism and destructive to women; others represent real human needs which the family may or may not be the best means of meeting. We should stop posing the question as being 'for' or 'against' the family and examine just what it is that we are talking about.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ "Towards a Marxist Theory of Women's Oppression," TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁸⁴ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970); Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

¹⁸⁵ "A Socialist Feminist Response," TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Essentially, this marks a development of the socialist feminist position I have discussed thus far. Namely, it challenges not only Wagner and the M-L perspective, but also the gay liberationist goal of the destruction of the nuclear family, thus far seen in both Coyle's writings in chapter one and in Henderson's work in chapter two. Indeed, the family section of this speech harkens back to Coyle's and Lerner's varying invocations of the family in a debate I understand as one over a definition of the workers. Similarly, some three years later, Ehrenreich, in line with Coyle if more direct, notes that "the operative definition of working-class in the DOC paper appears to be based on the traditional definition of 'industrial proletariat.' If so, we disagree." Ehrenreich also argues, in line with McMahon and Faherty, that the M-L perspective is often one that seeks to assert its perspective above all else, and often at the expense of larger goals, she counters, in line with NAM's focus on democratic decision making that, "[t]his is a style which must be transcended by any revolutionary movement with a faint hope of success."

In a turn to the line advocated in Judy Henderson's work, Ehrenreich argues that,

we believe it is vital to integrate the personal and the political, the public and the private... Integrating the public and private means taking seriously and participating in all places working people get together... We believe that the strategic key to revolution is an integration of workplace and community struggles. Workers and consumers, who are actually the same people, cast into opposing roles on particular issues, must come to ally themselves on the same side of particular struggles against corporate power and priorities... white workers in South Boston work side by side with blacks in factories and participate in integrated unions, but in the absence of a movement which brings together their workplace and their community lives, they were vulnerable to racist appeals which touched their fears of community disintegration.¹⁸⁶

As Deborah, a notetaker for the Women's Caucus would point out, "everyone I spoke to said it was the beginning of a full and informative debate between the two tendencies. As I see it, one

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

‘tragedy’ of the convention was that we somehow never were able to develop more fully and actually make progress in this key debate.”¹⁸⁷ Further, in response to the initial presentation about the conference, a member pointed out that the presenter “downplayed the lesbian role in the conference; one NAM woman felt this was typical of low consciousness of gay issues at the conference and in the SF movement as a whole.” The formal report from the Women’s Caucus highlighted the same tensions while adding that “Some women felt the position of the Durham women [represented by Lucy Wagner] was a retreat from the insights of the women’s movement that women’s oppression is many faceted. In specifically addressing issues raised by the Third World Caucus at the Conference, they included “no input from third world women on the conference planning committee,” “that anti-imperialism was presented on an abstract level, not as part of the class struggle,” and that “too much time was devoted to personal issues.”¹⁸⁸

NAM’s Androgyny Caucus

Following a perspective that “sex roles” exist as a product of capitalist oppression, NAM began engaging discussions of androgyny, as the caucus describes it, “a vision of society where men and women can be not just equal but the same, where the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ have lost all meaning and any human can have any mixture of those qualities.”¹⁸⁹ This approach to liberation has roots in gay liberation movements as Karla Jay and Allen Young note in their 1992 introduction to *Out of the Closets*.¹⁹⁰ In one of the larger caucus events that

¹⁸⁷ “Women’s Caucus Notes,” TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ “Androgyny Caucus Report,” 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁹⁰ Karla Jay and Allen Young, *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (NYU Press, 1972; 1992), xxxiv.

addressed sex and sexuality, 50 people, “mostly men” attended the discussion. The caucus also marked a coming together of Men’s and Women’s Caucus discussions. Centrally to this project, their work extended the public and private discussions that I have discussed within the Women’s Caucus. They argue that “we should learn to see how social roles come from the social system. The two spheres of production are dependent on each other’s grief. Women’s work and life are often the same (‘labor of love’), which can be destructive.”¹⁹¹

They also extended questions of sexual freedom through a notion of intimacy and unrepressed sexual energy. They argue that “Women—and people—have a need for intimacy as well as sex but we treat it like a need for sex.” This, they note, “leads to ‘orgasm economism’...” and “a lot of our other needs are put onto sexual needs—no wonder they’re so complex and difficult. What really matters is sexual energy.”¹⁹² This approach would come to the fore in later work from NAM as they more fully articulated what socialist liberation may allow for.

NAM’s Gay Men’s Caucus

“In situations like this we are angry, not gay!”¹⁹³ -NAM’s Gay Men’s Caucus

The NAM Gay Men’s Caucus, a caucus whose early activities I detailed in my first chapter, specifically through Brian Coyle, would publish a two-page critique of the convention in response to a set of different issues that in many ways align with Coyle’s early critiques of homophobia in the New Left. Brian Coyle had left NAM in 1973 due to experiences of being

¹⁹¹ “Androgyny Caucus Report,” 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ “Statement of Criticism: From The Gay Caucus,” 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

overworked and inconsistently paid as National Office Coordinator. As he would conclude his letter, “During the last two years working for the organization, I have learned and loved more than any other time in my life.”¹⁹⁴ The Gay Men’s Caucus’ “Statement of Criticism” starts with reference to the declining presence of gay and lesbian members in the organization. They begin, “[a]t the time of this leaflet’s printing the number of active participants in both gay caucuses was seven. Last year’s gay caucus (both women’s and men’s) totaled approximately 30 participants. This drastic reduction in the number of NAM’s only minority grouping coupled with a low level of consciousness in relation to gay NAM members and gay oppression is a painful and serious situation.”¹⁹⁵ Indeed, as I discussed in chapter one, Coyle’s early NAM discussions, he was equally critical of lacking involvement of gay and lesbian NAM members, as he had noted only five were openly in attendance at Davenport.

The caucus identified five areas that they argue demonstrate that “NAM membership has systematically ignored the needs and issues that are relevant to gay people,” specifically addressing their letter to “NAM men.”¹⁹⁶ Their points read as follows,

1. With the exception of a lame reference by the NIC majority strategy paper, no other strategy paper made any reference to the situation of gay people... From an organization which considers itself socialist-feminist we find this to be a serious error and a personal insult.
2. We assume that the men’s caucus is an attempt at establishing a structure where NAM men can begin to discuss their sexism and their roles as men. Yet in the planning of this caucus no gay male input was sought. Gay men experience a particular oppression (material, psychological, physical and cultural) and have to share with other men in this area.
3. At present not one NIC nominee has addressed him/herself to gay oppression when speaking to a socialist-feminist position (if it was spoken at all).

¹⁹⁴ Coyle Resignation Letter, 28 September 1973, Box 2, Brian J. Coyle Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁹⁵ “Statement of Criticism.”

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

4. The presence of the October League's (OL) literature table at the convention characterizes the insensitivity of the convention planners. OL has a reactionary, sexist line on "the Gay question." We do not view OL's sexism as a mere expression of differing opinion—it is an un-Marxist, un-scientific expression of bigotry which is in contradiction with NAM's fundamental socialist-feminist perspective. We do not enjoy participating in a NAM conference where an organization is given space to dismiss our existence as gays as products of bourgeois decadence.

5. The simultaneous scheduling of the socialist-feminist caucus, the androgyny caucus and the gay caucuses also exhibited a lack of awareness which merits criticism.¹⁹⁷

Regarding the October League's presence at the convention, there was a convention vote "to let the OL table stay" and although the measure passed, allowing OL to continue tabling, the Gay Caucus found hope in the fact that "the resolution *did* commit NAM to struggle against 'communist' anti-gayness. Now, NAM should carry out *that* part of the resolution too." Further, the caucus asserted the need for building "internal education materials on gay liberation and socialist-feminism, and produce a mass NAM pamphlet on gay liberation,"¹⁹⁸ while it is unclear if this pamphlet came to fruition prior to 1979, in 1979, as I have mentioned, NAM would produce such a pamphlet. Across this statement, the Gay Men's Caucus challenges the terms of NAM's socialist feminism through their experiences as gay men. They reassert the place of gay men's experiences of oppression as central issues in socialist organizing.

They continue with a list of suggestions for moving forward as an organization, framing these comments out of their own feelings: "we seriously question why we are working in a heterosexist socialist organization."

1. We strongly urge next year's planners of the convention to 1) seek gay male input in the planning and organizing the men's caucus and 2) to seriously consider holding a plenary and workshops on sexuality to discuss its politics and related issues.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ "Gay Men's Caucus Convention Report," 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

2. We feel that on a local level chapters should engage in the establishment of men's groups in which NAM men would struggle against their own sexism and homophobia. We also encourage the start of socialist-feminist study groups which include study of gay people.

3. The national organization should concretely express its commitment to gay liberation by the following 1) establishing regularly communication with progressive and socialist organizations 2) struggling against anti-gay attitudes wherever they are found whether in our day to day basebuilding work or in other left organizations in which we work in coalitions 3) giving organizational support to gay socialists who seek to build a base among gay working class people 4) allocating NAM money if needed for the establishment for a regular gay newsletter within the organization.

They conclude by noting, "Our struggles to recruit gays to NAM and socialism is difficult enough by having to deal with the history of anti-gay positions of the left. It is further complicated by internal sexism. We hope that the membership of NAM feels as we do that an injury to one is an injury to all." The Gay Caucus also posed a number of amendments to both the main strategy papers up for discussion and the one year plan. These amendments both address and extend their comments in their open letter. The caucus was able to pass two amendments which were the inclusion of the lines, "The oppression of lesbians and gay men sustains the patriarchal family and reinforces oppressive sex roles. We support the right of gay people to create autonomous organizations throughout the revolutionary process."¹⁹⁹ They also added an amendment that expands on these arguments by noting, "[i]n speaking of anti-sexist practice and issues it should be assumed that this always included the struggles and interests of gay people,"²⁰⁰ while it is clear that the language of "sexual politics," as Brian Coyle invoked it, had lost use, the comments seem to align well with the same perspective; that is, gay liberation must be an integral aspect of a wider revolutionary struggle, especially one against sexism.

¹⁹⁹ "Gay Caucus Amendments," 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Further, the caucus supported a statement from women on the NIC that socialist feminism must center the oppression of women and gay people. They argued that “in socialist feminist program study, and propaganda, the main emphasis must be on women’s oppression and also on gay oppression,” responding to a group of men out of Binghamton that sought to center “men’s liberation” in NAM’s work. The Gay Caucus countered that “Male roles in America do twist men’s lives, but this twisting is the result of male privilege and male supremacy—women and men DO NOT suffer equally.”²⁰¹

Interestingly, the two amendments, both of which failed, speak more generally to the anger members of the Gay Caucus felt. In one they expand on the “lame reference by the NIC majority paper,” demanding that the entire section be deleted. They note that “Besides the fact that this paragraph trivializes and distorts gay oppression by implying it is a ‘new lifestyle’ (implying gay liberation is a personal solution) it limits anti-sexist/anti-gay political work to opposing repressive legislation against homosexuality.”²⁰² This point explicates the deep tensions over how to practice a gay socialist perspective. In continuing, on different terms, Coyle’s argument that rights-based struggles are not enough for a revolutionary project, the Gay Caucus seems to assert that they would rather have sexuality removed completely from the document, than reduce and distort their struggle and organizing to an argument for rights.

Their final failed amendment demands that their concerns with NAM’s practice be publicized explicitly in their strategy paper. They sought to include a line that reads, “despite

²⁰¹ “Gay Men’s Caucus Convention Report,” 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰² Ibid.

NAM's theoretical commitment to struggle against sexism, heterosexual male dominance persists within the organization harming our internal life and our socialist-feminist practice."²⁰³

While the Gay Caucus certainly expressed their anger about the status of homophobia and sexism in NAM, they also seemed to see a set of possibilities out of their work, as they noted, "we feel we had a real impact on this year's convention, forcing NAM to begin dealing with gay politics. We gave each other emotional support, and had basic political unity on issues facing us at the Convention." Further, in line with a commitment to having these discussions in NAM, they identified approximately twenty texts in circulation that speak to the links between gay and lesbian liberation and socialism. And, relevantly to contemporary conversations about the state of gay and lesbian socialist organizing, the caucus discussed the place of Bay Area Gay Liberation (BAGL), and demanded that NAM "establish links with BAGL, Lavender and Red and other progressive gay women's and men's groups."²⁰⁴

Convention Aftermath

After the convention, Irwin Silber would publish a scathing critique of the NAM Convention on behalf of the Durham Organizing Committee, the group that had been pushing an M-L perspective within NAM. In particular, he argued that NAM's debate over the October League's presence at the convention was "anti-communism." In response, NAM's NIC wrote a letter asserting NAM's perspective on gay liberation, very much in line with the critiques the Gay Caucus raised at the convention. The NIC argues that "NAM's position on homosexuality is that antigay practices are rooted in sexism. Sexism is an ideological practice that justifies social

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.; As Emily K. Hobson describes in her book *Lavender and Red*, BAGL participated in substantial coalitional involvement in anti-racist organizing, for one instance, see page 86.

differences by reference to biological differences... NAM sees the fight against any attempt to determine one's destiny based on biological—or racial!—characteristics as integral to the struggle for socialist revolution."²⁰⁵ This understanding of gay liberation as subsumed under sexism would grow within NAM, although it would be challenged by some gay and lesbian members as well. By framing gay liberation under sexism, NAM was able to link the two struggles, but this would also leave them open to criticism from both women and gay men who felt the ties did not necessarily indicate the same oppression.

In the same meeting, the NIC rejected the applications from two chapters that had been associated with the "Alliance of Revolutionary Workers." In relation to the Milwaukee chapter seeking to charter with NAM, members of that group had written a leaflet that argued, "People of the world, and in the U.S., who are suffering the ravages of capitalist exploitation, wars and racism can hardly afford the luxury of 'feminism' in nylon anarchist underpants or the bitchy fight against 'sexism.'"²⁰⁶ These comments appear to nicely align with the work of the October League who frequently asserted that "gay liberation is bourgeois decadence."

As I have indicated previously, clearly NAM was open and willing to work in coalition with many groups, as McMahon and Fahrety had noted, this was a distinguishing facet of NAM compared to other socialist groups at the time. And yet, they maintained a sense of "unity in principle" such that NAM would not accept affronts to their political project while allowing for a breadth of approaches under their name. To this point as well, in a Winter issue of *Moving On*,

²⁰⁵ "Response to Irwin Silber," *The Guardian*, 1975, TAM.051, Box 3, 1975 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

NAM detailed activism across the country, of note for this project, the Pittsburgh chapter demonstrated against legislative efforts to deny jobs to gay people in the state, in addition to speaking at a Service Employees International Union event “emphasiz[ing] the importance of collective action for all workers.” Further, the Mad River Chapter, out of Dayton, OH, maintained participation in their local NOW Chapter and also worked on larger clerical workers organizing efforts.²⁰⁷ At this point, work was also developing on planning for the upcoming International Women’s Day events in the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia chapters.

At the NIC’s January meeting, a deeper discussion of integrating gay liberation into NAM’s work occurred in both the Women’s Caucus and the Men’s Caucus. While both came to different conclusions about the place of gay liberation in their work, I believe the work of the Women’s Caucus particularly structured much of the emergence of NAM’s later work on the topic. In the Women’s Caucus, Elayne Rapping laid out four points for further gay liberation engagement within NAM, “1-the nuclear family-how is gay oppression related to the family structure; to what extent can gay liberation be achieved in a capitalist society; 2-the relationship between gay oppression and women’s oppression; this concerns areas of personal life that are political concerns; sexual oppression maintains a reality in addition to economic exploitation; 3-differences in the oppression of gay women and gay men, different tendencies in the movements.”²⁰⁸ In their discussion, Holly Graff, a central figure in the development of NAM’s political perspective,²⁰⁹ argued that “positions stipulate that the family should be

²⁰⁷ “NAM Around the Country,” *Moving On*, Winter 1975, TAM.051, Box 4, NIC Meeting Minutes Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰⁸ “NIC Meeting Minutes,” 4 January 1976, TAM.051, Box 4, NIC Meeting Minutes Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰⁹ “About Us,” Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.dsasusa.org/about-us/>.

abolished and that this condition would bring about a socialist revolution are distorted; the disintegration of the family has been ongoing for years and it is not in our power to maintain or abolish the family.” This point seems to align with much of my previous discussion of NAM’s socialist feminist relationship to autonomous women’s movements. That is, that sexuality alone is not going to bring about a revolution.

Somewhat in line with Judy Henderson’s work in my previous chapter, the idea of the destruction of the nuclear family, a major point advocated for by gay liberation groups, cannot exist alone in a socialist struggle. Further, another member sought to build “a material analysis of gay oppression” on the grounds that “gay liberation is a vital consciousness-raising step towards class consciousness and toward building a unified working class movement.” Laying out the points that would become central in later NAM writing, Judy MacLean discussed the material oppression of gays in terms of being “denied jobs, housing, access to media” and “they are subject to police harassment, imprisonment etc. Moreover, they experience psychological oppression in being forced to deny themselves all of their lives.” And finally, Dorothy Healy commented that “we must not limit the fight for gay and women’s oppression to demands around democratic right[s] in that the only demand capitalism can’t absorb is the demand to end class exploitation.”²¹⁰

In contrast to the discussion in the Women’s Caucus that began from a set of questions that to some extent presumed the importance of gay liberation to NAM’s larger goals, the Men’s Caucus began from a critique of the recent adoption of a new platform on gay liberation at the recent convention. The Men’s Caucus notes, “without conducting [an analysis of gay

²¹⁰ Ibid.

oppression in the US], we adopted at our Convention, an amendment to our strategy position which states that ‘the oppression of gay people is integral to maintaining capitalism and patriarchy.’”²¹¹ Their first point of fundamental agreement at the meeting was that “gay oppression is not integral to the maintenance of capitalism; homophobia serves to divide the working class and is often consciously used by the ruling class and its agents for precisely that purpose, but unlike racism and sexism the oppression of people as gays is not structurally integral to the functioning of US capitalism.” At this point, it is worth readdressing one of the central critiques of the Gay Men’s Caucus in Oberlin, namely that the Men’s Caucus had no involvement with gay people at its creation. The Men’s Caucus notes continue,

we should be critical of tendencies within the gay movement which are ‘utopian’ (i.e., which posit gay sexuality as superior to heterosexuality or which call for the abolition of the family).

We must carefully distinguish between female and male gay liberation and the dynamics of each; given the power of men over women, elements of male gay liberation can strengthen the relative position of men, gay and straight, vis-à-vis women; those elements are not progressive.

We must realize the growing importance of the gay issue throughout society, particularly its increasing entrance into the workplace, and we should more thoroughly prepare ourselves to confront and combat gay oppression.²¹²

The men of the Men’s Caucus seem to align their perspective quite closely to a notion that “gay sexuality is a product of bourgeois decadence.” They fail to approach sexuality as a material struggle, and instead argue that it is only an issue held within “the upper strata,” and one that they assert is distinctively not a base issue. That is, it will go away with the revolution, indeed,

²¹¹ “NIC Meeting Minutes,” 4 January 1976, TAM.051, Box 4, NIC Meeting Minutes Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²¹² “NIC Meeting Minutes,” 4 January 1976, TAM.051, Box 4, NIC Meeting Minutes Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

another member would add, “hetero- and homo- forms of sexual behavior are both compulsive forms of behavior shaped by capitalism.”²¹³

In the discussion notes for the meeting, one member is noted as saying, “We must separate female and male gay liberation. Female gay liberation is primarily derived from the women’s movement as a whole and thus represents an attack on sexism. Male gay liberation has aspects of woman-hating within it. Female sexuality, in addition, is tied to the labor market; gay sexuality is only diffusely tied to capitalism.” Immediately followed by another joining the conversation, “We should learn not to tie all phenomena to the economic base of capitalism, elements of superstructure can have a life of their own.”²¹⁴

While these discussions point to and concretize many of the experiences of gays and lesbians within NAM, and admittedly, much of this project has centered the perspectives of gay and lesbian socialist feminists within the organization, it is clear that many NAM members continued pushing for sexuality as a revolutionary project. In one of the most thorough expansions of Coyle’s 1971 call to theorize sexuality in relation to socialism, two NAM presenters, Shim and Cedar, would lay out a theory of gay oppression under capitalism through a socialist feminist approach.

Let’s Kill Ozzie and Harriet

“Sexuality is no longer anything which expresses our natural desires, but is a contract which can only be entered into when it serves the function of procreation of a future generation of workers who can face the same process. **FUCK FOR THE STATE!!**”²¹⁵-Shim and Cedar

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Shim and Cedar, *Sex and the State, or, Let's Kill Ozzie and Harriet: a Lesbian Perspective*, (San Francisco, CA: The Whole Thing, 1977).

Shim and Cedar's speech, later published as a pamphlet titled *Sex and the State or Let's Kill Ozzie and Harriet: a Lesbian Perspective (Sex and the State)*, was presented at a NAM event on Gay Liberation and Socialism in the Bay Area in April of 1976. Panelists also spoke on gay liberation in the Soviet Union, "Being Black, Lesbian and Revolutionary," and "the indigenous socialism of Native American peoples."²¹⁶ Further, as I have suggested, NAM's Bay Area Chapter played a considerable, if unacknowledged here, role in working with gay liberation and socialism. Beyond Shim and Cedar's speech, Bay Area NAM members were involved in coalitional struggles in the Bay Area, as suggested by Emily K. Hobson in *Lavender and Red*. In a later section of this chapter, I also address Bay Area NAM's critiques of the Venceremos Brigade from 1975.

Shim and Cedar begin their pamphlet by confirming the sexist position of others in the Left they encountered noting they were "assailed with questions like 'what has sex got to do with the revolution?'"²¹⁷ And they conclude, "it became evident that even the more liberal parts of the left didn't understand our struggle as gay people and hoped we wouldn't waste too much time talking about it so we could concentrate on 'the real revolution.'"²¹⁸ As I have laid it out here, this framing would speak directly to the Men's Caucus members who specifically challenged the place of sexuality as a base issue in the organization. And, the question of the "real revolution" structures Shim and Cedar's entire work as they maintain a claim that the real revolution is tied up in rejecting capitalism, imperialism, and embracing sexual liberation.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Their speech also argues that members, like those in the Men's Caucus, are failing to address socialist histories, even if those histories have largely been ones of erasure, "[a]t one time a lot was being written by Marxists and other socialists about the nuclear family," yet they continue, "Unfortunately, along the way much of this analysis has been lost or ignored and people who had talked about radical changes in the family were driven from the Communist Party."

They then speak to the specificity of gay people having "a unique understanding of the family and how it functions from the vantage point of those who are generally unable to participate in it." Further, they assert their position that gay liberation is a base issue for socialist organizing, "our analysis of sexual repression, authoritarian conditioning and the nuclear family and how these things work to preserve and maintain capitalism is essential to a wholistic understanding of this system and how it is maintained in each of us." This argument draws on a few distinct discussions I have already addressed within NAM, on one hand, the return of the work of Wilhelm Reich, a socialist psychoanalyst, which I had approached in chapter one through Coyle's similar engagement with notions of psychological repression as the basis for gay oppression. And second, Judy Henderson's, and NAM's socialist feminist understanding of a need to integrate the personal and the political. For Shim and Cedar, this can be seen in the tensions between a "wholistic understanding of this system," the political, and its maintenance "in each of us," the personal.

They continue by laying out a relationship between the family, sexuality, the public and private spheres, and extend this through an engagement with a personal and emotional understanding of the process. They argue,

In the ideal family each member has a socially/economically defined role. There is a husband whose job it is to sell his days in return for a wage... The wage is then given to the wife who is also a worker. Her job consists of reproducing and rearing children (future workers) and maintaining the private life of her husband by selling him all of her time, her sexuality and her labor, and by taking responsibility for his emotional well-being.²¹⁹

Here we get an initial taste of sexuality without emotion, a wife's work is sexual, thus they are alienated from their own sexual practices. And yet women are also responsible for the sensuous experiences of men outside of men's labor. That is, women are doubly denied access to themselves. They can only experience alienated sexuality through their labor at home and they are the basis for supporting men's private emotional needs, ones which they are repeatedly denied.

As the authors continue discussing the "alienation caused by this system" which "is evident everywhere," they note, "we are left bored, frustrated and robbed of the fruits of our labor as well as any feeling of accomplishment or self-determination. Life becomes divided into work and fun and we are expected to buy back our humanity in the form of a two week vacation, fast cars and plastic toys."²²⁰ Here we can read a claim that humanity is constituted through access to a range of emotions beyond "boredom and frustration," the symptoms of alienation in this conceptualization. That is, since life is reduced to two parts, work and fun, and we buy back the "fun" aspects of our humanity, it would seem that first, work, sex in the case of women, is not pleasurable, and second that we are haunted by our alienated experiences. As they beautifully note, "we are robbed of the feeling of love which would come from taking part freely and equally in a human community. This love is then sold back to us in Hollywood movies

²¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

²²⁰ Ibid, 4.

and football games.”²²¹ Shim and Cedar’s analysis suggests that under capitalism, we not only buy back love but we buy back ourselves.

Most significantly for this chapter, Shim and Cedar do not conclude that rights have a place within their struggle, as they put it, “We are not suggesting a reform of the patriarchal family so as to make it easier to live under capitalism which would be a distinct possibility in a movement individual in nature and disconnected from a social collective movement.” Rather they argue that

We are trying to create the space for our children... where they can grow into the revolutionary potential they were born with... We wish to create the space for women to develop the strength they have always had but have been forced to subvert to fit into a male supremacist society... We want women and men to grow to be rebellious expanding revolutionaries rather than allowing ourselves to be subverted into passive, frightened people on the one hand, and soldiers, rapists, and killers on the other.²²²

It is worth addressing that their claims here operate outside of much of the concern the Men’s Caucus had raised, Shim and Cedar do not theorize homosexuality as more radical or inherently better than heterosexuality, nor do they deny that homosexual men can be sexist. Rather, they argue that the revolutionary potential, of all people, becomes alienated and repressed through the logics of capitalism, and specifically their impact of family structures. Thus, they suggest that all people have an inherent sensual energy in need of release. While this approach certainly aligns with some “utopian” understandings of gay liberation at the time, specifically ones that posited Gaysexuality as an essence that has been repressed by society, it is distinct in as much as Shim and Cedar offer a material analysis of emotional and erotic alienation that impacts all people under capitalism. This approach would continue within NAM through the

²²¹ Ibid, 4.

²²² Ibid, 13.

Blazing Star Chapter in the coming years, while Blazing Star's work would also mark a substantial rise in rights-based work on gay liberation within the organization. Prior to turning to the rise of Blazing Star in NAM, in 1977, I will briefly address the events of NAM between April of 1976 and 1977, namely their Fifth Annual Convention.

NAM's 5th Annual Convention, Cedar Rapids, IA, 1976

"We in NAM can note important strides that have been made when we look at our own organizational development and mass work over the past year. But when we measure our growth against—or that of anyone else on the Left—against the most crucial test—our ability to influence larger political and economic developments—we cannot help but be conscious of our own inadequacies"²²³ -NIC, *Moving On*

Coming into the 1976 Convention, NAM's NIC would frame the moment in terms of a renewed commitment to their political goals in the frame of a growing conservative trend nationwide. Some two months later, in December of 1976, the city of Miami would announce debate and discussion on a city ordinance to ban discrimination against gays and lesbians. The ordinance's passage in January of 1977 would produce a massive growth of conservative organizing against homosexuality, marked in this project by Anita Bryant's central role in the anti-gay Save Our Children campaign.²²⁴

As NAM's NIC would argue, "The 1976 NAM Convention represents the new directions that the organization has embarked upon as well as a reaffirmation of some of our most basic political ideas." They identify a new strength in unity along with a deepened "commitment to fighting racism and sexism as we have come to grasp more concretely the depth and

²²³ "NAM Convention '76," *Moving On*, Summer 1976, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²²⁴ Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*, Book, Whole (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1977).

pervasiveness of these forms of oppression. And we have moved toward a greater sense of commitment and common purpose within NAM itself.” Further, NAM members would tout their role in work with the July 4th Coalition, an effort to build a national anti-imperialist response to the United States’ Bicentennial, that involved six national leftist organizations. Most significantly, they pushed for and succeeded in building a gay liberation perspective within the programming, although the accomplishments of the longer view of the coalition itself seemed to be in terms of building internal cooperation on the Left, rather than specific success of any one demonstration. As the adopted one year plan would note, although gay liberation was only addressed once in the draft one year plan prior to the convention, “Attempts by socialist-feminists within the gay movement to unite with women, workers and other oppressed people has resulted in their impressive and historically important turnout at the July 4th demonstrations.”²²⁵

With regard to the convention itself, a substantial portion of time would be dedicated to building an anti-racist platform, and specifically one that engaged sexism in relation to racism in the US. Further, the NIC noted that the “Convention will also address issues of sexism—the oppression of women and gay people,” in a move that appeared to link women’s and gay oppression under a project of “sexism” as opposed to two independent struggles. In terms of furthering a perspective on gay liberation within the organization, this approach drew some criticism from members.

²²⁵ “NAM Convention ‘76,” *Moving On*, Summer 1976, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

One proposed amendment to the one year plan, that was not adopted, speaks to a sense of frustration within NAM about the state of gay liberation organizing. The Santa Cruz Chapter framed their amendments as “we believe the issues of gay oppression have not been sufficiently addressed and should be more fully incorporated into NAM’s plans for community, workplace, and internal struggles.” They continue by arguing, “We see involvement in struggles for gay liberation as crucial to the development of a viable working class movement. Failure to engage actively with lesbians’ and gay men’s organizations around issues of gay oppression would be detrimental... and would implicitly encourage separatist tendencies that are a realistic response to the lack of seriousness given to gay issues by many predominantly heterosexual left groups.”²²⁶ This approach inverts the concerns of the Men’s Caucus that I have discussed in this chapter, rather than NAM needing to determine if gay liberation is a revolutionary or reactionary struggle; Santa Cruz argues that the Left’s failures to engage heterosexism is the basis for autonomous organizing. For their part, Santa Cruz Chapter proposed the inclusion of “heterosexism” after every invocation of “sexism” and “lesbians and gay men” after every invocation of “women.” While they would withdraw their proposal prior to the convention, in favor of a more grounded approach suggested by Judy MacLean, their original proposal is noteworthy for its demand that lesbian and gay issues be at least rhetorically considered with all agenda items. In a proposal circulated regarding anti-sexist organizing and the one year plan, “We will develop a national program for organizing clerical workers and encourage chapters to work in this area if possible...Our rationale for focusing on clerical workers as NAM’s first priority in feminist work has several components.” Notably they argue that

²²⁶ Ibid.

clerical workers are among the lowest paid, most proletarianized of all workers. They play a vital role in the maintenance of capitalism and have a great potential for collective, revolutionary activity... For those NAM members who wish to work within autonomous gay and feminist groups, the NIC will prepare a set of guidelines as to what organizations to join, under what circumstances, and how to participate in and relate to them. There will be separate guidelines for mass organizations like NOW as opposed to local autonomous groups, like socialist/feminist unions. Since the left has had a bad history of relating to such organizations in dishonest and opportunistic ways, we feel the need to set clear guidelines for principled, honest and constructive participation in them.²²⁷

They also affirm the continued need to “target International Women’s Day and Gay Pride Week as national NAM events which all chapters should relate to.” This question of guidelines for working within autonomous groups is interesting in as much as it seems to focus on protecting the autonomous groups from undue NAM influence rather than seeking to protect NAM. That is, they frame their guidelines in terms of previous failures on the left to relate honestly to feminist and gay liberationist struggles. As I have discussed in each of my chapters thus far, this perspective continues NAM’s rejection of strategies such as infiltration, as used by groups like the Socialist Workers Party and the October League.

The Sojourner Truth Organization (STO) out of Chicago, which as I discussed joined NAM the previous year, circulated a proposal that intimately linked male supremacy and racism, in an effort to impact the NAM approach to racism. In response to the affirmation of “right to seniority” policies in the United States, STO argues that “The right to seniority was a victory won by Black and white men and women workers after years of struggle, but has since been used to perpetuate past discrimination and protect white men from the worst effects of high

²²⁷ “Draft Section on Anti-Sexism for One-Year Plan,” August 1976, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

unemployment.”²²⁸ In the face of this moment, STO responds that they “propose that NAM call for a national campaign for affirmative action in layoffs, hiring and promotions. We propose that NAM support the call for super seniority in all areas of employment,” which would respond to the disproportionate layoffs of women and Third World workers, as they note, “without super seniority, last hired is first fired.” Beyond articulating a mass response to seniority, STO also lays out a claim for the intimate links between racism and male supremacy. They argue that,

the privileges that white women have are a noose that binds them, like all white workers who accept them, to the ruling class. Because they identify as white rather than working class, they identify more with the bourgeoisie, and bourgeois ideology, than the rest of the working class. We see this—the identification on the basis of skin color rather than on the basis of class as the central barrier to revolutionary consciousness and revolution in the United States. The struggle against male supremacy—the relative privileges of men over women—will only be a revolutionary force when it fights male supremacy at the point where it is linked to white supremacy—in the struggles of Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Asian, and Native American women. We believe that it is in support and unity with these struggles that the white women’s movement must base its strategy.²²⁹

Besides offering a challenge to both white women and men within NAM, demanding their work on anti-racist issues, the STO also poses an alternative approach to Marxist-Leninism than the Durham Organizing Collective had in their 1975 debates with socialist-feminists. In place of waged housework, and relating to women as workers, centering wage labor, the STO argues that Third World women had already been performing this organizing and that it is white women who are dividing revolutionary movements, not Third World women. It also offers a

²²⁸ “Fighting Male Supremacy and White Supremacy,” August 1976, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²²⁹ Ibid.

direct response to NAM's anti-sexism approach in as much as that document makes no mention of Third World groups in its proposal.

While this approach was discussed at the convention, it would not find its way into NAM's One Year Plan, as indicated by the plan's line, "the breaking down of a totally separatist approach [by Third World organizations] has opened the door for the development of broad alliances to fight racism and repression,"²³⁰ as though it had been the Third World organization's failure to work externally, rather than the failure of white people to act in alliance with Third World organizations. Although it would appear NAM's work on the July 4th Coalition would also align with the STO's perspective. It is also worth noting the STO would publish a pro-gay liberation response to Blazing Star's work in 1980.

NAM's 6th Annual Convention, Cedar Rapids, IA, 1977

To the tune of "bye bye love":

"Don't buy juice
Citrus fruits

If its from Florida
Theres a boycott going on

Down in Florida
They took a vote
To use gay people
As a scapegoat
They tied to tell us
That we're not fit
To work with children
Or some such shit."²³¹ -NAM Gay/Lesbian Rights Workshop

²³⁰ "One-Year Plan," August 1976, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²³¹ "Gay and Lesbian Rights Workshop Notes," August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

In June of 1977, residents in Dade County would vote to repeal the county's anti-discrimination legislation by a margin of two to one. The turnout would be the largest in Dade County special election history. As Jason Black and Charles E. Morris III argue, "The year 1977 proved to be one of the most important in GLBTQ history to date, the best and worst of times, though its memory has been overshadowed by Stonewall and by the tragic events of 1978."²³² This vote, and the success of the Save Our Children campaign would also result in additional efforts to repeal anti-discrimination laws in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Wichita, Kansas and Eugene Oregon over the next year.²³³ Beyond returning Anita Bryant to national attention, her campaign and growing anti-gay legislative efforts would also result in the solidification and magnification of gay liberationist political campaigns on a local and national scale. In June of 1977, for example, Harvey Milk would become the first openly gay elected official in California. And, in 1978, Brian Coyle would run for U.S. Senate in Minnesota.²³⁴

Although I only have access to a few documents related to events between 1976 and 1977, the documents from the convention speak to important issues that would shape how NAM moved through the rest of the decade. One notable accomplishment that NAM members would highlight both in their discussions and in external letters responding to inquiries, would be the success of creating a women's concerns committee within a larger boycott and eventual unionization of textile workers at J.P. Stevens in the south. Leading into the 1977 Convention, NAM's recently formed Political Committee, created to help build unity and evaluate

²³²Jason Edward Black and Charles E. Morris III, *An Archive of Hope: Harvey Milk's Speeches and Writings*, 1st (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt24hsnt>.

²³³ Kitty Krupat and Patrick McCreery, *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance* (U of Minnesota Press, 2001), 36.

²³⁴ US Senate Campaign Folder, Box 5. Brian J. Coyle Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

organizational directions along with the one year plans, published an extensive report of NAM's political direction within wider US political movements. Most pressingly, they address the turn to conservatism in the United States as they note in terms of "difficulty passing the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], the supreme court decision on seniority and affirmative action, the Bakke decision in California, the support for the Hyde amendment on abortion, the failure of common site picketing—all these and much more point to a conservative bent."²³⁵

Specifically on the state of the women's movement, they note that the "socialist feminist tendency within the movement has not been able to grow significantly and its major organizations have dissolved." They add, "one of the disturbing trends of the past year has been the dissolution of many of the local groups that have politics similar to NAM's—particularly socialist-feminist women's unions. Unfortunately, the demise of these groups has not served to produce an increased understanding of the importance of a national organization."²³⁶

In contrast to the general state of the women's movement, the political committee approached gay liberation by stating, the "issue of gay liberation exploded this year with unexpected fervor. The Florida referendum and Anita Bryant's counter-campaign were a spur to widespread activity. All across the country gay people and supporters turned out in record numbers... Gay pride weeks were bigger—and more political—than ever." This analysis on the part of the Political Committee not only suggests that NAM's national leadership was closely

²³⁵ "NAM One Year Plan," August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²³⁶ "Political Committee Evaluation," August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1976 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

watching the rise of gay liberation organizing but also that NAM's own political strategy would need to more specifically address the role NAM members and NAM as an organization would play in an expanding the gay liberation movement.

While a larger turn to conservatism in the United States may have reduced the work of socialist feminists in particular, even as it saw an explosion of work on gay liberation, one important moment for NAM, from the perspective of this project, occurred as a result. With the folding of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU) in 1977, Blazing Star, a lesbian socialist feminist collective, would decide to charter as a NAM chapter.²³⁷ As I have discussed previously, the CWLU played a significant role across NAM's existence, and in 1977, both organizations were headquartered in Chicago. At the 6th Annual Convention, Blazing Star would predominate in asserting the necessity of linking socialist feminism with gay liberation in the organization. Further, they would bring a different perspective to NAM's project, as a socialist feminist group active for slightly longer than NAM had been in existence. In relation to previous conventions, 1977 would mark an explosion in work on gay liberation, in line with the national responses to Anita Bryant that I discussed.

Blazing Star

At a Lesbian Rights workshop event, held by Blazing Star, the organizers laid out both a view of the gay movement in general and its specific relation to capitalism. Beyond acknowledging that "socialists were frequently involved in speaking for gay people," they also addressed tensions between medical and social views of sexuality, denying a notion that gay

²³⁷ "Building the Independent Women's Movement," August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1977 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

people are those “engaged in homosexual activities” in favor of an understanding of gay people as “whoever says they’re gay.” Attendees also discussed overt experiences of oppression in terms of jobs, housing and child custody, as well as covert experiences of gay oppression such as family life, being in the closet, and cultural experiences of gays and lesbians in terms of bars and social life.²³⁸ This meeting alone, from what I have read, marks a much more substantial platform for understanding gay liberation in NAM. Much like my discussion of the C. P. Gilman Chapter’s chartering as an autonomous women’s chapter in NAM, Blazing Star would follow and build on this legacy. Where previous NAM work on gay liberation had relied on relatively small meetings of gay and lesbian members at national conventions, now Blazing Star emerged as an autonomous lesbian socialist feminist group who placed gay liberation at the center of their work.

One of the many discussions of gay rights at the convention would center the specific work of chapters with members from across the United States sharing their experiences over the last year. In Austin, aligning with the importance of Anita Bryant’s rise to conservative fame, NAM members not only participated in anti-Anita Bryant rallies, they were also able to secure the support of Chicano and Black groups on a bill to end housing discrimination. In Chicago, members worked across a number of coalitions with goals ranging from reform to revolution. These included the Gay and Lesbian Coalition, a Gay Socialist Group, and the Gay Rights Taskforce. In Pittsburgh, NAM members not only marched in the Pride Week but also participated in a coalition of NAM, SEIU and local gay and women’s groups to successfully

²³⁸ “Gay and Lesbian Rights Workshop Notes,” August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1977 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

advocate against laws banning gay people from state employment. This was one of many important liberal responses to the growing conservatism that had emerged over the previous years.²³⁹

In addition to running these workshops, Blazing Star, with the support of the Socialist Feminist Commission, sponsored a resolution on “Gay/Lesbian Rights” that would pass, although some members noted its “mild language.”²⁴⁰ The resolution begins by noting that “Gains in gay/lesbian rights made over the last few years are being threatened and other gay/lesbian rights are increasingly under attack. Many Americans are concerned about the implications of the gay/lesbian liberation movement, and the right wing is making every effort to capitalize on that concern.” Although they also acknowledge that “The issue of gay/lesbian liberation goes beyond the immediate concern with gay/lesbian rights and specific actions aimed at obtaining those rights, important as that is. Ultimately the goal of gay/lesbian liberation is the positive encouragement of sexual self-determination for all people and the establishment of gay/lesbian relationships as equally valid as any others.”²⁴¹ In the face of a concerted right-wing attack, NAM members turned towards the protection of rights as an immediate struggle that could build a base and confront oppression, apparently setting aside efforts to theorize a place for gay liberation within a wider mass socialist revolution.

That is, their statement on the purpose of gay liberation turned towards affirming self-determination, in contrast to previously articulated goals that understood gay liberation as a

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ “Gay/Lesbian Rights Resolution,” August 1977, TAM.051, Box 3, 1977 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

necessity for the liberation of all through the destruction of capitalism. The specific strategies for NAM to enact this vision were articulated as, “direct[ing] the socialist-feminist commission to investigate ways of working with national gay/lesbian organizations such as the National Gay Task Force and the Gay Rights National Lobby, endors[ing] the boycott of Florida citrus products... mandat[ing] the establishment of national NAM literature on gay/lesbian liberation... and support[ing] the institution of ongoing Gay Men’s and Lesbian Caucuses within NAM.”²⁴² From this statement, it is clear that NAM sought to align their work with larger national gay liberation efforts as they saw the growing politicization of gays and lesbians as an opportunity to build expanded coalitions and take specific actions that would challenge homophobia in the United States.

While I will expand on the work NAM did to circulate literature on gay liberation in the final section of the chapter, which included the publication of *Sex and the State* in 1977, I want to conclude here by turning to shifts in NAM’s gay liberation resolutions over the next three national conventions.

NAM’s 7th Annual Convention, Milwaukee, WI, 1978

In July of 1978, at NAM’s national convention in Milwaukee, NAM expanded their previous resolutions to more substantially include the role of a socialist perspective on gay liberation. Blazing Star would articulate their perspective within a rising conservative movement through a successful resolution at the convention. As they begin, “In the last eighteen months, a campaign has developed attacking gay rights and gay people... This campaign is part of a broader right-wing attack on a number of issues related to lifestyle and

²⁴² Ibid.

the family, such as the ERA and reproductive rights.”²⁴³ Clearly tying gay rights to women’s rights, through the ERA, Blazing Star identified a larger degradation of rights as a site of socialist organizing and struggle.

They continue by pointing to weaknesses within gay and lesbian movements as they stand noting specifically a need to strengthen the “national coordination and direction of the movement. In the face of a nationwide campaign against gay rights, the lack of national response is a serious weakness.”²⁴⁴ That is, although there had been substantial local responses to conservative backlash against gays and lesbians, Blazing Star argues that national gay coordination would be essential to countering a now national Save Our Children Campaign. Aligning with their statement from the previous convention, they also argue that “socialists can and should play a role in support of the gay movement. Gay socialists should, wherever possible and however appropriate, raise socialism within the gay movement.” In particular they argue that socialism should be articulated as follows, “Socialism has consistently emphasized the importance of mass participation in efforts to gain rights and liberation. The gay movement has relied too often on behind the scenes lobbying and the efforts of a few activists. Gay socialists can indicate the importance of and encourage efforts to include participation of more gay people in the movement.”²⁴⁵ That is, NAM would offer a position of increased transparency and democracy within autonomous gay and lesbian organizations. As they argue, where previous legislative victories to affirm gay and lesbian rights had involved “the efforts of a few activists,”

²⁴³ “Resolution on Gay/Lesbian Liberation,” July 1978, TAM.051, Box 3, 1978 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

NAM members sought to advocate for democratic principles within gay and lesbian organizations.

Second, NAM adopted a specific strategy for the Briggs Initiative, a state bill that would ban gay and lesbian employment in California schools. Emily K. Hobson argues that “the threats posed by Bryant and Briggs realigned gay and lesbian activism by shifting the context that defined left-liberal coalitions.”²⁴⁶ Drawing on the work of BAGL, she argues that “gay leftists differentiated the rights they would fight to defend,” separating resisting laws that would impact workers from more assimilationist rights such as involvement in the military. As I discuss, this appears to align well with my discussion of NAM’s turn towards rights in this period. She also notes that the Briggs Initiative, and its later iteration in a state referendum as “Proposition 6,” gained attention in both straight and gay leftist work because

Proposition 6 attacked sexual freedom, workers’ rights, and unions simultaneously: it sought to require local school boards to fire or refuse to hire any teacher... known to have ‘engaged in public homosexual activity or homosexual conduct’... The measure defined ‘activity’ and ‘conduct’ as including ‘advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging or promoting of public or private homosexual activity’... meaning that teachers and staff might be fired for not only sexual behavior but also for voicing a political opinion in support of gay and lesbian people.²⁴⁷

Thus “Proposition 6” and the Briggs initiative united a range of previously tangential groups under the goal of affirming the rights of gays and lesbians in California.

With a vote on the initiative only four months away, the national attention of the Briggs Initiative was also mirrored in NAM’s work. NAM supported the position that all chapters in California should combat the initiative as “a priority” issue. The strategy called for large scale

²⁴⁶ Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 87.

²⁴⁷ Hobson, 88.

involvement in “anti-Briggs Coalitions,”²⁴⁸ door to door canvassing, and performing educational work within and outside of their chapters. Further, they encouraged non-California chapters to “have members spend time in California” and fundraise within their areas. They argued these steps were necessary not only for defeating the initiative but also for gaining “legitimacy within the gay/lesbian community” and building organizational knowledge about resisting anti-gay policies, as they conclude “since it is likely that we will be faced with this kind of issue again.”²⁴⁹ While I have not come across any documents that speak specifically to the work of NAM in California at the time, the Briggs initiative would fail, in a success for gays and lesbians that is frequently tied to Harvey Milk’s work on the issue.²⁵⁰

In line with this project, NAM also approved the creation of a “Gay and Lesbian Liberation Taskforce,” through the Lesbian and Gay Male Caucuses which was conceived to “collect and disseminate organizational and educational information...” because, “in general both these functions have lacked the direction and comprehensiveness that a Task Force would provide.”²⁵¹ The goal was to build gay and lesbian presence within the organization and develop stronger ties to autonomous gay and lesbian organizations. This taskforce operated under the Socialist Feminist Commission and centered a number of socialist feminists in the organization, including four Blazing Star members. Once again, the proposal sought to unite individual gay and lesbian members’ work through a national taskforce. Importantly, the taskforce would be

²⁴⁸ “Work on the Briggs Initiative,” July 1978, TAM.051, Box 3, 1978 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Black and Morris, *An Archive of Hope: Harvey Milk’s Speeches and Writings*, 197.

²⁵¹ “Friendly Amendment to the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Resolution,” July 1978, TAM.051, Box 3, 1978 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

focused on both internal and external work. They would both distribute information publicly and “further coordinate gay and lesbian consciousness raising talks”²⁵² for the organization.

Finally, the taskforce would “prioritize organizing possibilities as we gain practical experience and should coordinate the publication of *The Working Papers on Gay and Lesbian Liberation* as well as other writing on theory and strategy.” Envisioned as an opportunity to “provided a presence for NAM in recruitment of gay men and lesbians into NAM,” from what I have seen, this marks the first time NAM nationally sought to recruit gays and lesbians, rather than this work occurring exclusively through the sporadic efforts of individual members. Further, the taskforce justified these strategies as part of building support networks outside of NAM because “we need autonomous organization to provide support and coalesce our struggle from a position of strength.”²⁵³ Significantly for this project, the publication of these working papers in 1979 would mark the coalescing of socialist feminism and gay liberation theory and practice in the organization.

After the convention, and the failure of the Briggs Initiative a few months later, NAM chapters, such as Baltimore and Blazing Star, would continue their local work on gay liberation. The beginning of 1979 would also mark a national effort to organize gay and lesbian liberationists through the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (MOW). As Amin Ghaziani details in his *The Dividends of Dissent*, the 1979 march was the product of six years of failed efforts to organize a national march. Ghaziani notes that the success of the 1979

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

campaign was in part the result of figures like Harvey Milk advocating for it to occur.²⁵⁴ He also notes that the march adopted a single-issue gay rights platform to ensure the broadest unity amongst gays and lesbians.

Within NAM, some tensions were registered over concerns about the need and value of the march, aligning with Ghaziani's argument as well. For example, Chris Riddiough, of *Blazing Star*, advocated for not nationally endorsing the event on the grounds that there was "debate within the gay community around the timing of the march and the demands, and the sectarian involvement, especially in Chicago and nationally, have resulted in questions about how broad a base can actually be built."²⁵⁵ Further, the Baltimore NAM chapter had already endorsed the march and noted that in both Pittsburgh and Baltimore, there was no sectarian infighting. The Baltimore chapter was also actively involved in planning for the march in their region. This set of challenges, namely the limited rights scope of the event and how NAM should participate in it would continue into the 1979 convention.

NAM's 8th & 9th Annual Conventions, 1979-1980

Due to my limited access to internal notes and discussions between 1979 and 1980, this section addresses convention platform proposals dealing with gay liberation as discussed and adopted at both conventions. With only two months before the MOW in October, gay and lesbian initiatives at the convention would center the place of the march in NAM's work. Two amendments were proposed that point to the continued tensions in NAM about proceeding

²⁵⁴ Amin Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁵⁵ "Industrial Heartland Region Notes," June 1978, TAM.051, Box 1, Chapter Reports Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

with the march. One by Marc Killinger, a NAM member and author of one essay in the *Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism*, as I will discuss next, would argue for full national support of the march. After tracing a short history of gay liberation between 1969 and 1979, he argues that “it is clear that the gay movement is split by the same racism, sexism and classism that pervades our entire society; the progress heralded by newsweeklies like Time is reflected in the increasing commercialization and ‘normalization’ of homosexuality as encouraged by business-oriented segments of the gay community; progress for some is not progress for all!”²⁵⁶ Here, Killinger points to a larger result of gay and lesbian issues coming to the national scale, namely its reduction to a set of assimilationist issues. In response, Killinger advocates for NAM’s involvement in an effort to both democratize the MOW and to advocate for the radicalization of attendees. To this end, he writes, “we shall work to develop local outreach literature that reflects our positions,” thus while he fully recognized that NAM could not necessarily nationally influence the march, members could use their local bases to “participate in the MOW [March on Washington] organizing as ‘out’ socialist feminists, combating the red baiting that continues to surface.” Finally, he concludes his statement by arguing that “our long-term strategy be that the gay movement be one ultimately speaking to the needs of more oppressed working class and third world gay men and lesbians so that people in the gay movement more explicitly come to be part of the overall progressive movement.”²⁵⁷ This perspective also marks how NAM’s relationship to gay liberation changed in this period. With the growth of a national focus on rights-based organizing, NAM sought to

²⁵⁶ “National March on Washington Proposal,” August 1978, TAM.051, Box 3, 1978 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

push a now national perspective further to the left. While I have no access to a full account of NAM's involvement, they certainly had a presence at the march and would walk with other national organizations in attendance.²⁵⁸

At the 1980 convention, Blazing Star would continue to develop NAM's gay liberation platform. In their resolution, which would be adopted, they argue for a "Dual Approach to Feminist and Lesbian/Gay Organizing."²⁵⁹ This dual approach sought to organize two groups, "left influenced organizations... and organizations not particularly influenced by the left." In contrast to previous NAM platforms that laid out plans to radicalize already progressive gay liberation organizations, and ignore those that were more conservative; the new approach adopted sought to work across both groups. The necessity of this project is clearly marked within a growing conservative and apolitical moment that can be generally marked with Ronald Reagan's election in the same year. Thus, NAM members also turned to considering what a leftist perspective could look like when conservatism was on the rise. With regard to "left influenced feminist and lesbian/gay organizations," they argue that "we can learn from and influence the theoretical and strategic ideas of other socialist feminists, and such work anchors our full socialist feminist vision in practice." As justification for expanding their work, they argue that these left-influenced groups "tend at present to recruit and activate the already convinced."

²⁵⁸ "Baltimore Chapter Report," June 1978, TAM.051, Box 3, 1978 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁵⁹ "A Dual Approach to Feminist and Lesbian/Gay Organizing," August 1980, TAM.051, Box 3, 1980 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

With regard to “Women’s and lesbian/gay organizations which are not particularly influenced by the left,” they specifically identify NOW and gay and lesbian rights organizations as relevant examples. Blazing Star argues that the importance of this work lies in “working on a close and sustained basis with people who are open and questioning but not already in general agreement with us. It is only by influencing those that do not share our politics that we can move toward the accomplishment of our goals.” Further, they point out that “this is a vital task in a period of generally low political activity. Not always, but often, there is a tradeoff between who we can organize and how radical a vision or program we can present. Working in non-left organizations can enable us to present a positive image of socialist feminism to people who equate feminism with bra-burning... it is important for our own learning so that we have a better understanding of how people closer to mainstream America are thinking.”²⁶⁰ They conclude their proposal by arguing for humility, “we must avoid the temptation to prove our own anti-racism, our own pro-lesbian and gay politics by denouncing other organizations’ errors in the harshest terms. It is critical for our work with and in non-left organizations be based on respect... It is possible to respect a political position... and not find those reasons sufficient to make you agree.” This perspective would mark the most encompassing approach to feminism and gay liberation within NAM as it sought to fully consider all groups working on similar issues. And this resolution would align with all of NAM’s work on gay liberation, centering the place of autonomous organizing while working to push all organizations towards a socialist feminist coalition.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Outside of gay and lesbian liberation, NAM adopted a resolution to “enter into negotiation with the DSOC to create a new organization.”²⁶¹ In line with the turn towards electoral politics and legislative activity in terms of gay liberation which I have charted in this chapter, NAM was organizationally turning to an emphasis on these same issues in many spheres of their organizing. Importantly, as they moved towards a merger, NAM maintained that “the documents drafted by the NAM and DSOC negotiating committees must be consistent with current NAM principles and political perspectives. In particular this would include a commitment to socialist feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, antiracism, anti-imperialism, internal democracy and mass organizing at the grassroots level,” while in retrospect, many NAM members would note that socialist feminism and gay and lesbian liberation would fall to the side in the merger. This was in part because of the DSOC’s much larger, if less unified, perspective that as I discussed earlier in this chapter, often involved existing as an umbrella organization for leftists interested in electoral political change, while maintaining a main figurehead in Michael Harrington. As I briefly discuss in my epilogue, NAM’s merger with the DSOC in 1982 would produce the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Today, the DSA is notable for being the largest socialist group in the United States and it continues to function with a wide range of activists under its name.²⁶²

Rather than conclude this chapter on NAM’s merger negotiations and dissolution over the next two years, I want to return to 1979 to center one of the most public and available

²⁶¹ “NAM/DSOC Merger,” August 1980, TAM.051, Box 3, 1980 Convention Papers Folder, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁶² “About Us,” Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/>.

aspects of NAM's legacy, their working papers on both socialist feminism and gay liberation in relation to socialist feminism.

NAM's New Working Papers, 1978-1979

This section considers how the internal discussions and debates I have laid out across this project coalesced and were extended in two of NAM's later externally focused publications, the third edition of NAM's *Working Papers on Socialism and Feminism*, published in 1978, and NAM's *Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism*, published in 1979.

As I mentioned in my second chapter, one important and public aspect of NAM's discussions on socialist feminism was the production of the first *Working Papers on Socialism and Feminism* in 1975, which, at the time did not include any comments on gay liberation or sexuality and contained four essays on socialist feminism. In 1978, NAM released its third edition of the *Working Papers on Socialism and Feminism*. This edition contained nine articles and a more substantial consideration of both their socialist feminist perspective and their perspective on gay liberation. The introduction to the third edition notes that, "the experience of important forces in the feminist movement has led many to recognize that women and gay people will never gain complete freedom under capitalism."²⁶³ The first essay in the collection is a version of Barbara Ehrenreich's speech I previously discussed, demanding an account of Marxism and feminism that can "address the political/economic/cultural totality of capitalist society." In addition to Ehrenreich, NAM members such as Roberta Lynch, Holly Graff, and Sara Evans all have articles that speak to the importance of furthering socialist feminism in mixed

²⁶³ New American Movement. *Working Papers on Socialist Feminism*. 3rd Ed. (Chicago: New American Movement, 1978).

and autonomous organizations, in a set of papers more than twice as long as their first iteration.²⁶⁴

Two of the essays in the working papers specifically address the place of gay liberation within socialist feminism. First, in Holly Graff's text, "The Oppression of Women," she argues that "The oppression of women has involved the denial, the deformation, and the abuse of women's sexuality." To this end, she notes that "Lesbians suffer job discrimination, seizure of their children, and general harassment." She then argues for the right of all to sexual self-determination noting that lesbianism offers one such point of this work. She continues, "As long as lesbianism is denied, sexual self-determination is impossible for all women. We must struggle for a society where lesbianism is not merely tolerated but where sexual self-determination is positively encouraged."²⁶⁵ Here, Graff asserts the importance of free access to sexuality as both a necessity and something that cannot be achieved under capitalism. Importantly for this project, it marks a continuing link between NAM's socialist feminist and gay liberationist perspectives.

Second, the Bay Area Chapter of NAM had their 1975 statement on anti-gay policies in Cuba republished. In an approach that is quite similar to Coyle's arguments in *Hundred Flowers*, which I discussed in the introduction, the Bay Area Chapter critiques both the Cuban Government and the Venceremos Brigade. With regard to the Venceremos Brigade, a US-based leftist group that supported Cuba, the Bay Area Chapter advocates for Cuba, the Venceremos Brigade, and "the Left to begin to confront these expressions of anti-gay feeling, for two clearly

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

related reasons—First, because the struggle against sexism in all its forms is an integral part of socialist revolution. A revolution that leaves repressive and hierarchical sexual roles intact is no revolution at all.”²⁶⁶ I believe these developments in NAM’s working papers indicate their growth towards a wider view of socialist feminism in relation to sexuality. These developments would continue into the next year with the publication of the *Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism*.

Published in 1979 by Blazing Star, *The Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism* (1979 *Working Papers*), resulted from previous work at NAM’s national conventions to further an internal and external conversation about gay liberation and socialism, as I have addressed earlier in this chapter. The introduction to the 1979 *Working Papers* stakes these investments immediately in an introduction written by Hannah Frisch, a member of Blazing Star who had been involved in proposing many of the NAM resolutions I have just discussed. She begins,

The Working Papers on Lesbian/Gay Liberation and Socialism are addressed first of all to people who sense a connection between gay liberation and socialism and who are interested in thinking about that connection, in developing theory to make the connection more explicit. *The Working Papers* are also addressed to skeptical audiences: to socialists who doubt whether gay liberation has much to do with the real revolutionary work of overthrowing capitalism, and to lesbian and gay activists who don’t see socialism as having much to do with their liberation.²⁶⁷

This approach mirrors and furthers much of the work of NAM I have discussed thus far. The contributors all speak specifically to their own investments in both gay liberation and socialist work and further, demonstrate how and what NAM has allowed them to do across these issues.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ New American Movement, *Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism*, (Chicago: New American Movement, 1979).

The six articles contained in the 1979 *Working Papers* highlight many of the voices in NAM I have previously discussed, Judy MacLean, Chris Riddiough, Hannah Frisch, Marc Killinger, and Jeff Weinstein.²⁶⁸ The document also contains a reprint from a 1977 essay by the Gay Left Collective. The Gay Left Collective, out of England, is now one of the better-known groups that addressed socialism and gay liberation with at least three former members who have become important in queer work, namely historian Jeffrey Weeks, film scholar Richard Dyer, and art historian Simon Watney. Beyond demonstrating that NAM was influenced by and likely influencing the trajectory of other gay socialist work, the inclusion of this text in the 1979 *Working Papers* also highlights NAM's investment in engaging work outside of their single perspective. This can be seen as well in some of the letters sent to NAM's national office in the period, including one from a NAM member living in Spain who passed along the work of the group Vindication Feminsita which was grappling with lesbianism within their socialist work in 1978.²⁶⁹ Similarly, Marc Killinger's contribution to the 1979 *Working Papers* focuses on reading with and challenging the text *Gay Oppression and Liberation or: Homophobia: Its Causes and Cure* written by the Movement for a New Society (MNS) in 1977. MNS was a Quaker collective and anti-war group, and Marc Killinger was both a NAM member and a member of MNS. It is also worth noting that the STO, out of Chicago, would write a response to Blazing Star's work on gay liberation critiquing its rights-based reformist agenda and furthering their own antiracist revolutionary perspective on gay liberation.²⁷⁰ That is, in contrast to 1971 when Coyle wrote of

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Judy MacLean. "Letter to Skip Oliver," 13 April 1979, TAM.051, Box 2, New American Movement Records, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁷⁰ Michael Staudenmaier and John Bracey, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969-1986* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012).

essentially three isolated gay socialists, David Thorstad and John Lauritsen of the SWP and Miriam of IS, working to theorize a relationship between sexuality and socialism, by 1979, socialists both in and outside of the United States were seeking to explicate these relationships.

While each of these examples speaks to how socialist work on gay liberation expanded in the middle of the 1970s, the 1979 *Working Papers* also speak to the rapid growth of literature on gay and lesbian life in the period. Some of the citations of the 1979 *Working papers* include Karla Jay and Allen Young's *Lavender Culture*, also published in 1979, Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American History*, from 1976, both of which allowed NAM to expand on their early work that centered Carl Wittman's "Gay Manifesto" and extended the work of Juliet Mitchell, Shulamith Firestone, and Kate Millett. Across the 1979 *Working Papers*, NAM members synthesize many of the perspectives I have addressed internally in the organization towards, as Frisch puts it, "developing a Marxism which not only supports but uses and is enriched by the insights of the lesbian and gay movements."²⁷¹

In the first essay of the collection, Judy MacLean's "Lesbians and the Left," MacLean begins by highlighting how recent political developments have shaped the growth in gay approaches to socialism. She starts, "In 1972 when the New American Movement, a socialist organization of which I am a member, made gay liberation part of its political principles, many leftists were dismissing gay liberation as merely a personal struggle."²⁷² As she continues, "by 1977, some participants in a Chicago march against Anita Bryant worried about the presences of a group called 'Gay Socialists'... More recently, leftists have been part of the massive actions

²⁷¹ New American Movement, *Working Papers on Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Socialism* (Chicago: New American Movement, 1979).

²⁷² *Ibid.*

against Anita Bryant. The left has come around, I believe, because lesbians and gay men refused to listen to criticisms of the early 70s and have built a strong and progressive movement."²⁷³

That is, from MacLean's perspective, the recent rise in socialist approaches to gay liberation can be tied to the rise of a conservative response to gay liberation, and the important ongoing work of gay liberationists in the face of open sexism and homophobia on the left.

MacLean also extends NAM discussions on the relationship of rights-based struggles to socialist revolutionary struggles. She argues that the oppression of lesbians is tied to a contradiction, based in the insights of NAM's socialist feminism, wherein "we are supposed to find freedom and happiness in our sexual lives" but "our most intimate relationships are forced to carry so many burdens—economic and emotional security in an increasingly hostile environment, adventure, fun, a place of rest and fulfillment, personal growth etc."²⁷⁴ That is, she argues that relationships are both understood as a moment of expressing freedom, while intensely constrained by the cultural expectations of these relationships. As she continues, "because we have no other way to fulfill these needs, we try to fulfill them in our personal lives. But we never quite make it; under capitalism our lives are like a bed without enough covers; an arm, a leg, or even a whole person is always out in the cold. And this can be as true for lesbian relationships as heterosexual ones." MacLean expands her bed metaphor towards the importance of gay and lesbian rights within a socialist project. She argues that "A reform like lesbian rights which gives us a measure of control over an area of personal, painful, and often unacknowledged oppression, can give us strength to meet other challenges." That is, in an

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

expansion on the necessity of reform, turns not on radicalizing an otherwise liberal rights struggle, but in allowing space for pursuing a revolutionary project. What she is seeking to allow space for in particular is an “erotic need” for “community love,” because, “the difficulty of creating good personal relationships is a social one.” Building on efforts to link the personal to the political, she argues that “to really create a loving community of the kind I am talking about requires political power. It means the whole community must control the resources on which our lives are based. We can only create it by transforming the whole society.”²⁷⁵ Thus, she argues for both the necessity of a reformist, rights-based, approach to sexuality while maintaining a larger political project that speaks to many of the efforts of NAM members I have discussed thus far, and especially to Judy Henderson’s efforts to integrate the personal and political seven years earlier.

In her essay on “Culture and Politics,” Chris Riddiough builds on previously published work on gay and lesbian communities to approach both the place of culture in revolutionary projects, a rejection of the economism I have previously discussed, and the possibilities of organizing lesbian and gay men within their communities.²⁷⁶ Building on some recent work I have mentioned such as Jay and Young’s *Lavender Culture*, and slightly older work such as Susan Sontag’s 1969 book, *Against Interpretation*, Riddiough discusses the importance of bars, gay ghettos, cruising, drag, and music within gay and lesbian communities towards an argument that socialist feminism “suggests that there are complex interactions between the economic system, the state, and society as a whole” of which “gay liberation is certainly a part.” Thus, she

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

challenges socialist divides between the political and the cultural, following Gramsci, to argue that gay and lesbian culture are both informed by and resist hegemonic cultural norms. On these grounds, she turns to building the “dual approach” to organizing within feminist and gay and lesbian organizations that NAM adopted at their 1979 convention. Riddiough argues that “Owning a women’s bar on the northwest side of Chicago does not make you part of the same class as the chairman of the board of General Motors. For many owners there is a swing between being owner, worker in a gay bar, and worker in a straight job,” that is, as she continues, “gay socialists have to learn to work *with* other members of the gay community and a reorientation of the bars is one way to start.” That is, Riddiough challenges socialist organizing to meet the needs and understandings of gays and lesbians, and offers an approach for both lesbian, gay, and straight socialists to approach culture as an important aspect of their organizing.²⁷⁷

In Hannah Frisch’s contribution, titled “Gay Liberation will Change the Culture,” she argues that gay liberation is not only a product of, and thus necessarily tied to, the women’s movement, but also that “the model of a minority trying to obtain civil rights does not fit the gay liberation movement.”²⁷⁸ Frisch contends that “if the lesbian and gay movement as a whole exclusively devoted itself to civil rights it could lose its potential for real change.” As she continues, she further foreshadows a number of concerns in the present in addition to building on NAM’s earlier work, “civil rights have enormous potential for mobilizing and energizing the whole movement for gay liberation. Gay liberation will have very wide effects: from the psyche

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

to the army, all culture will be touched. Gay liberation alone will not topple capitalism, but the balances which support the capitalist structure will be seriously disturbed.”²⁷⁹ I believe this insight speaks not only to NAM’s socialist feminist understanding of gay liberation across the 1970s but is a fruitful point for consideration in 2019, a point I address further in my next chapter. If NAM’s working papers from 1978 and 1979 speak to the continued importance of gay liberation and socialist feminism within the organization, I also believe they can continue to offer these insights in the present.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the emergence of a theoretical and practical perspective on gay liberation within NAM, out of their previous discussions of socialist feminism in my previous chapter. Where this chapter began with the outrage of gay and lesbian members over their belief that NAM was failing to center, or even consider, gay liberation in 1975, the next four years would produce substantial practical involvement in advocating for and defending gay and lesbian rights as well as a theoretical development marked in their working papers. I have also mapped NAM’s moves towards supporting gay and lesbian rights with two larger trends, a growing conservatism in the United States signaled by figures like Anita Bryant and Ronald Reagan, and a turn towards legislative and electoral politics within NAM. This chapter also marked the merger of NAM and the DSOC, a moment that resulted in the dissolution of NAM but certainly not the end of their legacy. My next chapter, the epilogue, points to the continued work of former NAM members through to today and suggests the importance of NAM’s work for the present.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

Epilogue

This project offers a rhetorical history of the New American Movement's efforts to theorize and act on gay liberation from a socialist feminist perspective. Through a reading of archival documents such as convention speeches, written NAM publications, personal and organizational correspondence, convention papers and notes, newsletters and internal planning notes, and local chapter reports, I have sought to insert NAM's work into academic research and work on gay liberation and feminism in the 1970s.

As I touched on in my introduction, Brian Coyle's personal papers, held at the Minnesota Historical Society, offered me one of my first experiences with histories of gay liberation and socialism in the 1970s. This moment gave me a glimpse of the possibilities of the past for impacting the present and future. As I had generally understood it, socialist thought and queer work were largely incompatible and my limited experiences in leftist groups had also affirmed this. But, since then, I have come to understand that the relationship between socialism, anti-capitalism, and gay liberation continues in the present as far more than a trace. That is, these archives have offered me, as Charles E. Morris III writes, "a comforting and challenging score to [my] quotidian experience."²⁸⁰ My efforts to follow NAM's history since then, and hopefully into the future, have only reaffirmed my belief, in line with my own becoming archival queer, that history offers essential resources for reimagining lives and work in the present. I can only hope that this project has done justice to the historical, and living, subjects I have addressed because their history has already offered me so much. And further, I hope that NAM's work may provide others similarly significant experiences.

²⁸⁰ Morris, "Archival Queer," 149.

Summary

My first chapter addressed the founding debates and discussions within NAM in the early 1970s. I laid out two competing approaches to NAM's work, where socialist feminist and gay and lesbian activists sought to push NAM to include insights from the women's movement and the gay liberation movement in their organizing. I argued that these debates laid the ground for NAM's socialist feminist approach over the next ten years. My second chapter followed up on these discussions and showed how socialist feminists sought to link socialism and feminism in their work, with a particular emphasis on NAM's 1972 and 1975 conferences on socialism and feminism. This chapter added texture to NAM's involvement in what would become one of their most noted events, the 1975 National Conference on Socialism and Feminism. My third chapter turned to how NAM's socialist feminist engagements with gay liberation grew out of the latter part of the 1970s. This chapter traced the relationship of NAM's shifting perspective in relation to the rise of a national gay liberation agenda, as a result of a growing conservatism represented by Anita Bryant. This chapter also tied NAM's eventual merger with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), a group focused on democratic socialist electoral politics, to a growing national gay liberation movement. As I mentioned, NAM's merger with the DSOC would create the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). While many NAM members, up to a third by some accounts, would leave the organization due to the merger, others, including Chris Riddiough, would continue in the organization.²⁸¹ Today, a portion of NAM's legacy remains their role in producing the DSA, a far larger organization than NAM had achieved in their independent existence.

²⁸¹ Cohen, "Recollecting The New American Movement: An Introduction."

Across these chapters, I speak to the wide variety of activists and approaches NAM was able to work with along with how NAM's work challenges generalizations about the relationship between sexuality and socialism in the 1970s. Beyond offering an unaddressed rhetorical history that links multiple, often understood as disparate, social movements of the 1970s, I believe NAM's archive can also invigorate contemporary discussions.

Possibilities

Approaching NAM through rhetorical history has given me the space to chart how NAM's ideas and perspectives on gay liberation and socialist feminism developed and shifted across the archival materials I have access to. This approach has allowed me to work on and around specific discussions and debates that fell under these terms. Rhetorical history has also allowed me to introduce NAM's socialist feminist approach to gay liberation to academic scholarship, in what was otherwise a gap in extant work. In beginning to fill this gap, this project also asserts that NAM's work intervenes in questions of archival theory and historicity. That is, I believe NAM's archive also opens up a number of other possibilities relevant to studies both within and outside of rhetoric.

First and foremost, as I mentioned in my introduction, this project is constrained by only using written and archived work. Oral histories or other forms of structured interviews, ones I am hoping to conduct over the next few years, would allow for NAM's work to come to life in a way that this project is lesser for not including. Additionally, I am grateful for Victor Cohen's interviews with some NAM members, his work offers an important perspective on NAM's legacy more generally, although as I have noted, those interviews did not center gay liberation work within NAM.

Second, NAM's archive is tied a number of other anti-capitalist organizations in the 1970s who engaged gay liberation on a variety of terms. Most notably, both in this project and across the papers I have accessed, the Socialist Workers Party stands out as a centrally involved group from the early 1970s, although generally not on the terms of coalition or inter-communalism, rather on the terms of infiltration. Similarly, as I approached in chapters two and three, the October League and their anti-autonomous movement approach are also worth more substantial scholarly engagement. In terms of mixed organizations that consistently supported gay liberationists in the 1970s, I have come across additional writing of International Socialists and the Quaker-aligned Movement for a New Society whose work is tangentially addressed here.

Third, it is worth noting that little attention has been paid to the socialist work occurring within gay liberation organizations. That is, while some histories suggest that gay liberationists appropriated Marxist terms, without their substance, it is clear that many did more than appropriate. As Emily Hobson and Roderick Ferguson detail in *Lavender and Red* and *One-Dimensional Queer* respectively, gay liberationists certainly worked in and in coalition with other radical organizations. Additionally, groups such as the Gay Activists Alliance and the Gay Liberation Front held Marxist reading groups under their name. Similarly, groups like Gay Flames, Gay is Angry, Gay Academic Union, Gay Revolution Network, and Red Butterfly were active in the 1970s and across the 1980s to various extents and all centered anti-capitalist, and some socialist, approaches in their writing but have also only found their way into footnotes, in

this project as well as others.²⁸² This project contends that these histories are essential for understanding and approaching sexuality in the 1970s and beyond and only begins to address the work of earlier gay and lesbian socialists in the United States.

I also believe NAM has much to offer histories of socialist feminist efforts to produce a unitary theory of oppression under capitalism. Following the recent and necessary work of Tithi Bhattacharya in *Social Reproduction Theory*, I believe NAM's work has many resonances with her insights regarding the necessity of a unitary theory both in our present and in the past.²⁸³

Finally, NAM has much to offer rhetorical studies. From their history as I have approached it, my first chapter could be considered in terms of the failures and successes of constitutive rhetoric, particularly in terms of their relationship with already constituted autonomous movements. My second chapter, and NAM's work on socialist feminism, has much to offer rhetorical approaches to consciousness raising. As consciousness raising studies make up a substantial portion of rhetorical research on the 1970s already, NAM's work can augment questions regarding the relationship between consciousness raising and caucusing in a mixed organization. Additionally, NAM members were adamant in their assertion that men must also have their consciousness raised to combat sexism, a point I believe has been left unaddressed in rhetoric. My third chapter offers insights into internal and external social movement rhetorics as well as coalitional rhetorics, and, in relation to the present, offers fruitful grounds for continuing to address anti-capitalist queer critiques in terms of both theory and practice.

²⁸² For ephemera from these organizations, predominantly pamphlets and flyers, see the Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, PE.036, at the Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁸³ Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

As queer research and work has come into its own in the present, NAM's work speaks to the importance of connecting sexuality, feminism, and anti-capitalism. Today, anti-capitalist scholarship on sexuality has been divided, by scholars on both sides of the divide, with historical materialist researchers on one hand, and post-Marxists on the other.²⁸⁴ From the late 1990s until recently, few scholars have even attempted, let alone succeeded, in bridging these perspectives. As I have discussed, in the last ten years scholarship addressing these links has continued to grow. I believe that NAM's work not only speaks to the difficulties of linking sexuality and socialist feminism but also offers important insights for accomplishing this work. And further, I believe that research into historical social movements, like this project and the essential work of the scholars cited here, can continue to link these movements in as much as they speak to moments when activists and theorists have come together and sought to challenge the terms of previous divisions. For me, much of the excitement and hope I see in NAM's work is due to my own experience and sense that divides in the present need not continue into the future.

I conclude here with the beautiful words of two former NAM members which I believe also speak to the importance of this project more generally. As Judith Gardiner wrote in 2010,

From today's perspective, many of NAM's early theoretical discussions sound utopian, although it also might be said that efforts to envisage a new and just society were among NAM's strengths. At the same time, actual NAM projects often worked via modest, practical, and reformist collaborations with liberal groups like labor unions and the National Organization for Women (NOW), sometimes influencing the groups' objectives in more progressive directions.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ One often cited iteration of this debate was between Rosemary Hennessy and Judith Butler. See for e.g., Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²⁸⁵ Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Ambitious Moderation: Socialist Feminism in the NAM Years," in *The New American Movement: An Oral History*, ed. Victor Cohen (Indiana, Pa.: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 50.

And second, I want to conclude with two of Brian Coyle's provocations from 1971, in an article that has and continues to influence me today, "'We cannot make revolution alone, but there can be no real revolution without us... **Keep Coming...**"²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Heterosexism," Brian J. Coyle Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

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