

Fort Dyke Equals Fascism In The Lesbian Movement

Fort Dyke, a lesbian separatist organization, is a growing force in the lesbian movement. It is important that we understand them for the danger that they represent

Their political analysis draws no distinctions between white men and Third World men, attacks the Black liberation struggle, and seeks to wreck and divide the lesbian movement. It was the struggles of Third World peoples for independence and freedom, and in particular the reawakening of the Black movement in the 60's that led women and lesbians to look at our own oppression, and organize to fight it. Fort Dyke would have us turn against that leadership in the name of lesbian liberation. This is truly doing the work of imperialism in our movement.

The politics expressed in *Tribad*, the journal of Fort Dyke, are also profoundly anti-woman. They dismiss as "man created/connected problems" the systematic campaign of rape and beatings which women all over the country are organizing against. Writing off the mass movement of women against male supremacy and for the right to fight back by any means necessary only helps The Man continue to oppress us.

Fort Dyke, in their own words, "perceives and defines the species of man as the primary enemy of Woman and all that is female." Their solution is the complete extermination of all men, because all men are equally responsible for the oppression of women. No matter what nation or class they come from, all men are exactly the same. They can't change because their actions and ideas are determined by the fact that they are men—genetically. This is biological determinism, like racism which defines Third World people as inferior, and sexism which defines women as, by nature, emotional and stupid. "Biology is destiny" is a fundamental male supremacist idea that lesbians have always fought against; it is fascist ideology whether it is the Nazi Party, the Klan, or Fort Dyke which peddles it.



United Press International
KLANSMEN JEERED: A young woman holding a sign taunted members of United Klans of America marching through downtown Tallahassee, Fla., to conduct a recruiting drive. About 100 Klan members were greeted by rock-throwing demonstrators and 1,500 spectators during the hour-long march.

By Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (N.Y)

We also need to look at how Fort Dyke carries out its reactionary politics: who, **in practice**, do they attack and who do they support? Their main energies are directed against Third World women who ally with Third World men in their struggles for national liberation; against Third World men; against those white women who challenge Fort Dyke's white supremacy; against lesbians who relate to organizations and coalitions of lesbians and gay men; against all male children; and against lesbian mothers who refuse to see that it is correct to give up their sons. Fort Dyke doesn't fight the real enemies of lesbians—not the state, not the right wing, and not those white men who are enlisted as the shock troops of imperialism.

A clear example of these politics is the discussion that went on at the Benefit for Assata Shakur which was held by PFOC/NY at the Women's Coffeehouse. We were mobilizing support for Assata Shakur (slave name: Joanne Chesimard), who is an imprisoned Black revolutionary fighter, and understood that the lesbian community is a central place where that support can come from. There's been for some time a consciousness about Assata in our community (among white lesbians; Assata's consistent support has always come from Black people, and that continues to be true.) The struggle that took place at the benefit was about how we see Assata and why we should support her: because she's a woman under attack by the patriarchy, or because she is a leader of the struggle of her whole people for their liberation. Defining Assata first and foremost as a woman is another episode in a long history of white people ripping off Black people from their struggle for self-determination and freedom—the context in which Assata has time and again defined herself. When Fort Dyke argued that lesbians should support Assata as a woman, and not as a Black revolutionary, Third World women at the Coffeehouse led the fight against the position and named it for what it was: racism.

When one Black woman asked Fort Dyke if they would fight for her baby son if he was under attack by the state, the response was that they wouldn't defend "a prick" no matter what color he was. That is white supremacy pure and simple: white women telling Black women that their sons are no different from the men in ROAR or the Ku Klux Klan.

This is all consistent with Fort Dyke's view of the world: "Socialist lesbians see Dyke Separatism as the enemy of the male revolution because we do not wish to concern ourselves with, and give our energies to, the struggle against the oppression of third world and lower-class men. That is correct. As Dyke Separatists we are concerned only with the oppression of women. And because women of the lower classes, poor white and all third world women, are the ones most



Susan Saxe

oppressed by patriarchy by virtue of their position at the lowest echelons of a racist, classist society, we find it absolutely necessary to incorporate into our dyke separatist theory an in-depth analysis of class and race. . . Women do not, by natural inclination, and because we do not have any power or money of our own, create classism and racism. However, eating a piece of that rotten pie ensures that some of us, a token few, have privileges at the expense of most of us who continue to struggle at the bottom of the ladder. By accepting that piece of the pie, we partake of the male system of class and race, we become guilty by association." (from *Tribad*).

It is not only "a token few" women who have privileges at the expense of Third World people—all white people in the US gain real material benefits from being part of a white oppressor nation which can exist only as a parasite on oppressed peoples. And this is the reason that white people, whether in the lesbian community or anywhere else, have never been "solidly behind Assata," as Fort Dyke so arrogantly claims. If we had been, why weren't there more of us in court when Assata was being railroaded into a life sentence in New Brunswick? Why weren't there more demonstrations, benefits, forums, to educate ourselves and fight to free her? Because we, too, as white people are part of a nation that thrives and grows fat by leeching off the labor and blood of oppressed nations around the world and within the borders of the U.S. White women can't declare ourselves "free" of white supremacy under the cover of dyke separatism. Without constant, conscious struggle against our own racism and in solidarity with national liberation—it will be our privilege as white people and not our

oppression as lesbians which determines our actions.

The politics of Fort Dyke are also profoundly insulting to women. It is assumed that any woman who chooses to work politically with men is "brainwashed" and can't have an independent political identity. If women who work with men are only "robots," no matter what we think or how we are organized to fight our oppression, then it must only be the women of Fort Dyke who are smart enough to truly see the interests of women—smarter than Assata, smarter than Joan Little, smarter than the thousands of women who have been a central part of the movements against racism, gay oppression and imperialist war.

The attack on PFOC/NY that appears in the first issue of *Tribad* came down because we are challenging the basis of Fort Dyke's politics, politics which can never lead the struggle for lesbian liberation. They attack us only insofar as we do what we have set out to do, to fight for the liberation of women and of lesbians, and against white supremacy.

US imperialism uses every tool it has to enforce heterosexuality because lesbians threaten the very basis of women's oppression: unwaged labor. Women in the family perform essential labor for free. If we didn't do the cooking, the cleaning, the raising of children, the caring of men, imperialism couldn't continue to function in the same way. To make sure we do that work, we are kept in our places by physical terror and economic dependency. And all white men are enlisted as the agents of imperialism in return for the privileges and services they get from our oppression. Women are nothing less than the private property of their husbands.



But there's another side to our role in the family: women who are in the family are in certain ways a lot better off than those of us who are not. Heterosexual privilege—physical protection, economic gain and social acceptability—exists side-by-side with the tyranny of men over women.

Lesbians challenge the heart of heterosexual privilege and male supremacy. We take a stand with our whole lives that says we are not fair game for men; we violate the code of private property which defines the lot of women. For this, we are beaten, harassed, gang-raped and our children stolen from us.

For those of us who are white, the choice is clear. We can fight to protect our privilege, and in so doing guarantee that we will never win our liberation as women and as lesbians, or we can link our struggle with the struggles of all oppressed peoples and of nations for liberation. These forces, throughout the history of this country and around the world, have and continue to lead the fight of oppressed people against the most vicious enemy, U.S. imperialism. But their victories over this oppressive system are our victories only to the extent that we as lesbians recognize this fact, and ally ourselves with them by taking up an active fight against white supremacy in our own movement. We believe that this is the road to our liberation as women, and as lesbians.

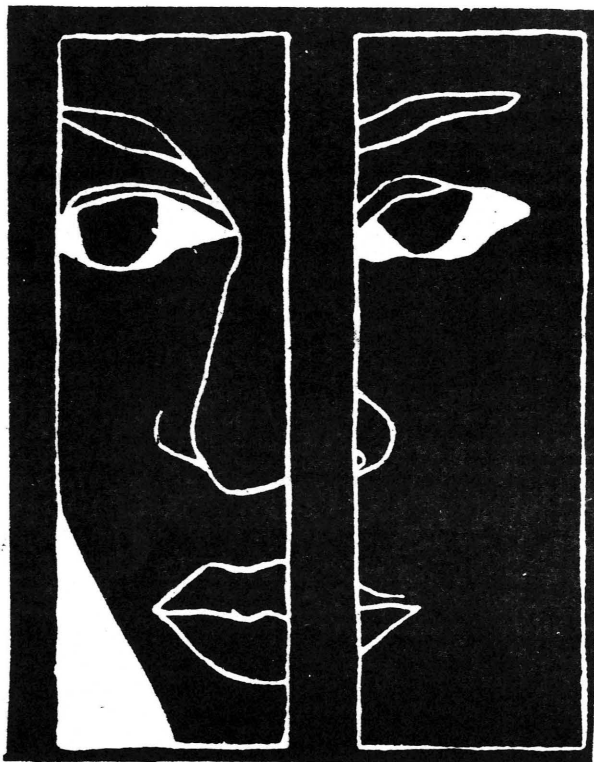
The supposed basis of Fort Dyke's attack on PFOC/NY is the charge that we are "an overground offshoot" of the Weather Underground Organization (a clandestine organization) and are united with them to destroy the women's movement. This is a lie: we are an independent communist organization with no political or organizational ties to the WUO, and we have fundamental disagreements with the understandings of women's oppression and of lesbianism that are expressed in the book **Prairie Fire**.

The specifics are not the point; the point is, in whose interests is Fort Dyke acting in printing these charges? Two years ago lesbian communities across the country were under attack by the FBI in a massive search for Susan Saxe and Kathy Powers. Women in Lexington, Kentucky and New Haven, Connecticut stayed in jail for months to fight for the principle that feminists and lesbians can never collaborate with the

imperialist state—its police, its investigations, its grand juries. Lesbians are continuously confronting the state head-on: they take our children, harass us on the street, enforce discrimination and humiliation. Apparently, though, if you are on Fort Dyke's enemies list, it is perfectly fine for them to finger you (or try to) for the cops.

Thousands of lesbians and gay men are taking to the streets in militant resistance to the anti-gay offensive that has begun in Dade County and is spreading. It is urgent that the lesbian movement analyze our oppression, understand who are our friends and who are our enemies, and organize to fight. To unite around a strategy to win, we have to be willing to fight against racist and male supremacist politics wherever we see them. It is time for us to take a stand against US imperialism and against Fort Dyke, its agents in our movement.

Lesbian Caucus of PFOC/NY
Representing the politics of
Prairie Fire Organizing Committee/NY
Lesbian Pride Week, 1977



Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (NY) is a communist organization. We work in solidarity with national liberation struggles which are leading the fight for socialist revolution in this country and around the world; and with all people oppressed by imperialism. The politics expressed in this paper are the result of over a year of rectification, and political struggle to overturn PFOC's earlier history of white supremacy, male supremacy, and anti-gayness. We are committed to fighting white supremacy and male supremacy in the world and in our own movement. Through study, struggle with comrades inside and outside of the organization, and a changing practice in the world we hope to better meet these tasks.

We welcome comments and input; our address is:
P.O. Box 411
Times Plaza Station
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217