

growth of homophobia — or at least of queer bashing — in the black community.

Violent attacks on, and even murders of homosexuals continue. Thousands of gay men are arrested each year for "sex crimes" in which there is no victim.

Increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men are coming forward to fight for the right of foreign lovers to stay in this country, a right not granted by the immigration laws.

London gives a warped picture. Outside the capital and one or two other cities, conditions for lesbians and gay men have barely changed (which is one of the reasons why the scene is so big in London; people leave their home towns in search of a freer atmosphere).

Because the changes which have occurred are rather difficult to define, they are more fragile than they appear. They would be hard to erase: recriminalisation is very difficult to imagine without major resistance. But we need to remember the fragility.

For hundreds and thousands of lesbians and gay men, daily life is still a constant battle with the comments of family and workmates, the fear of discovery, the potential violence of the streets.

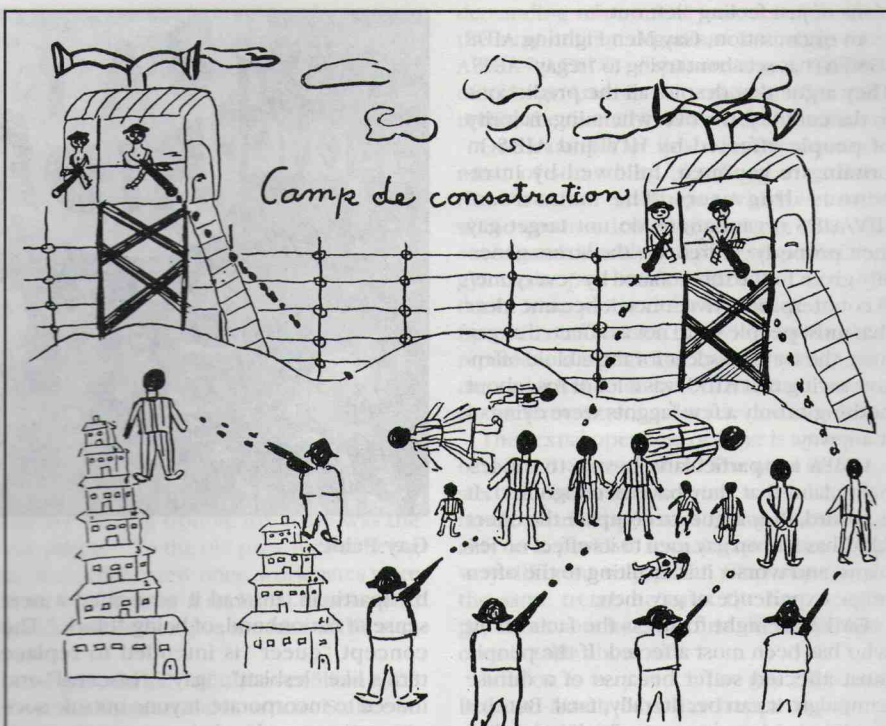
There is a long way to go.

But it is not clear that legal equality and general social acceptability would not be possible within capitalist society. The standard "Marxist" explanation for why this is not so — that the centrality of the family to capitalism is too great to allow it — is not convincing. Capitalism is very flexible. It is reminiscent of the argument that capitalism could not survive the end of apartheid in South Africa. That was more convincing to begin with, but it turned out to be false.

Sexual liberation is not simply about legal equality and social acceptability. It is about transforming the ways in which human beings relate to each other, sexually, and as men and women. It is about far more radical changes to what is considered "normal" than we can presently imagine. It is about removing, as far as humanly possible, every trace of violence and cruelty, oppressiveness and emotional brutality from our lives, and establishing at the heart of society the belief, in fact as well as theory, that everybody is equally human.

The struggle for lesbian and gay rights in the wider sense can and should be integrated into a struggle to change society root and branch. Even if the fight for equality is only for reform, like any other fight for reform, it can either be seen in isolation, or seen as part of a larger picture. It may be that the hope for a "socialist lesbian and gay movement" or something of that kind is not realistic. But lesbians and gay men can integrate their own struggles into a wider one, with a profoundly radical goal.

This is not to downplay the need to fight for our rights as militantly and effectively as possible. It is to say that, while it is increasingly unconvincing to argue that the struggle for those rights requires a struggle for socialism, like any other struggle this one can be a springboard for a broader look at what is wrong with the world we live in. ■



## A child survivor draws a scene from life in a Nazi concentration camp

Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it

By Irving Howe

THE HUMAN imagination has obvious limitations. It is a platitude that the sight of a child with a cut finger moves us more than a report that millions of people are hungry in some distant nation. Our sensitivities are calloused by the age in which we live; suffering, death, horror and cruelty have become such commonplace things that we take them for granted, as if familiar parts of a landscape. And we deliberately harden ourselves to our world; it is almost necessary to do so if we are to survive the mad society in which we live.

As I would read through an issue of *Labor Action* after it had been put "to bed" at the printshop, I would wonder to myself: here is an article written about hunger in India, which says that 20,000,000 people face starvation in that country. Does it, can it really convey the emotional impact which it should?

Can these abstract, general words really describe what has happened to this world?

Take a glance at the drawing accompanying this article. It is done by a boy of 13 who was in one of Hitler's concentration camps and who survived death by a miracle. His

parents were shot. He himself was led one day with 150 children to be shot. The bullets hit him on the left arm. He fell down, and with the blood of his arm colored his face and remained the only survivor among the 149 dead children. He then escaped in the darkness.

The drawing which this child made represents the execution.

Perhaps in this remarkable drawing we can understand the fate of society under capitalism; perhaps if we try to imagine what horror this child went through as we look at this drawing we learn something which no words can suggest.

I myself was moved by a small detail even more than by the little figures falling under the fire of the SS guards. Notice the row of prisoners' huts drawn on the side with numbers on each of them. That this child should have been so impregnated with the regimented orderliness of a totalitarian society — the meaning of his meticulous numbering of the huts — seemed to me the final, ultimate condemnation of the world which had already brought so much suffering to him. For capitalism means not only starvation and war and insecurity; it is the debasement of a man to the point where he is a mere robot-slave.

And then the robot-slave numbers the huts of his concentration camp.

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