

Opening the Profession

Joanna Ryan and Andrew Samuels

Early in 1995, it was announced that the Association for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in the NHS (the APP) had invited Professor Charles Socarides of New York to give its annual lecture. Well known as a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Socarides is also a virulent campaigner against moves for lesbian and gay rights, on the grounds that the homosexual rights movement constitutes a serious threat to Western culture. This has led him to oppose the 1973 de-pathologisation of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association, to argue vociferously in public against gay people serving in the US armed forces, to support the State of Colorado's threatened repeal of all gay rights ordinances and to say things that led a senior American psychoanalyst to accuse him of laying the blame on a gay murder victim for what had happened to him.

The APP, which restricts its full membership almost exclusively to consultant psychotherapists who have trained at organisations that are members of the British Confederation of Psychotherapists, asked Dr Ismond Rosen to be Socarides' discussant. Rosen often cites Socarides favourably and resembles him in having gone on TV to defend the Local Govern-

ment Act of 1989 that made 'promotion' of a 'homosexual lifestyle' an illegal activity for local authorities.

A meeting of the founding group of PCSR asked Joanna Ryan and Andrew Samuels to look into how best to respond. They drew up a letter to be circulated for signature which soon became known as the 'Letter of Concern'. This Letter connected the APP's invitation to two problematic issues concerning psychoanalytic psychotherapy in this country: first, the alleged discrimination against lesbians and gay men who try to train at the Institute of Psychoanalysis and some other psychoanalytic psychotherapy organisations; second, the privileged status given to graduates of the Institute of Psychoanalysis when it comes to appointments as consultant psychotherapists in the NHS, especially in London and the South-east. The fact that it was the APP at the centre of all this made such connections apparent in a way that, perhaps, they had not been before.

The Letter deplored the honouring of Socarides implied by the APP's invitation and underlined the very limited scope of the discussion being envisaged. Questions were also raised about what psychoanalysts in training were taught about

Joanna Ryan and Andrew Samuels describe the first steps in the campaign to ensure there is no discrimination against lesbians and gay men seeking to train as psychoanalysts or psychoanalytic psychotherapists. This piece is taken from Issue 1 of Transformations: The Newsletter of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility.

heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality. (It was a general feature of the campaign that sexual diversity was a focus as much as lesbian and gay issues in isolation.) This Letter was signed by about 200 registered psychotherapists, many more than the number who had originally received it. They were mainly but not exclusively of a psychoanalytic or Jungian orientation, working in both the public and the private sectors in all parts of the country.

Despite this, the responses we received from the various journals to which we intended to send the Letter have been rather worrying in what they reveal about the channels of expression open to psychotherapists. In the event, but only after considerable difficulty, it is to be published in the March 1996 issue of the *British Journal of Psychotherapy*. A summary was also published in the *Bulletin* of the Royal College of Psychiatrists that accompanies the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and in *Free Associations*, as well as in several newsletters. A full account of the problems we experienced with all the journals, including the reasons they gave for not publishing the letter, can be obtained from the address below.

Importantly, the Letter did not call for the lecture to be cancelled but for proper debate, and for the APP to distance itself from Socarides lest the situation of psychotherapy in the NHS be compromised, leading to it becoming difficult or impossible for lesbians and gay men to make use of NHS psychotherapy services. In fact, the APP did cancel the lecture due, they said, to threatened disruption by lesbian and gay activists. A second lecture by Socarides was disrupted but some debate did

prove possible.

The cancellation created a difficulty for our campaign because it then became possible for the issues to be swiftly converted into a problem of free speech, thus enabling numerous colleagues to decline support for the Letter because it appeared to infringe academic freedoms. We did our best to counteract this accusation and also to deal with the personal campaign mounted against some of us by certain members of the psychoanalytic community. Some people told us they were simply too scared to sign.

Reviewing the situation now, it is clear that the whole campaign has been highly successful, although what has been achieved should be regarded as only a few steps along a very long road.

A copy of the Letter was sent to the Department of Health. We heard from the NHS Executive and had a highly productive meeting with them. They took our concerns seriously and asked us to look into the question of anti-discrimination arrangements in the organisations belonging to the British Confederation of Psychotherapists. On our own initiative, we decided also to survey the sections of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. We have not received any response from BCP organisations, but we will publish the results of the survey of UKCP organisations in due course.

In June 1995 at a MIND Conference on lesbian and gay issues John Bowis, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, went out of his way to say that he understood the 'concern' expressed at the invitation which had been issued to Professor Socarides. He also praised the contribution of lesbians and gay men to British society

and condemned those 'psychiatrists and psychoanalysts' who regard homosexuality as an 'aberration or mental illness'. This speech and its relation to the Letter of Concern was widely and accurately reported in the press.

A meeting with the Labour front-bench spokesperson on mental health issues produced a positive response, together with a request that she be kept informed of future developments. The British Psychological Society and the UKCP expressed their support. Also, we have received many requests for people connected with the Letter of Concern to speak at conferences, give lectures and offer consultancies.

The Letter has produced striking results as a consciousness-raising phenomenon within the profession. Special meetings have been held in several psychotherapy organisations to discuss questions of homosexuality and training. It seems possible that a number of organisations which may have been operating discriminatory policies have begun changing them. Equal opportunity statements have been or shortly will be published by the Tavistock Clinic and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. The Society of Analytical Psychology has confirmed its position by publishing such a statement. All the statements specifically mention or will mention sexual orientation.

We urge caution in relation to these promising developments. It has not been easy to get anyone to admit that discrimination does take place. Even now, it is possible that grounds will be found to exclude lesbians and gay men, by for example demanding higher standards of 'mental health' from them. There is no indication of what arrangements have been made for internal or external monitoring of the situation in any of the organisations that seem to us to be shifting their positions. Crucially, the anomalies that now arise between psychoanalytic theories that continue to pathologise homosexuality and equal opportunities statements will need careful discussion, debate and negotiation. The experience of lesbians and gay men, even in those organisations that do not discriminate in terms of admission, merits our attention along with the actual content of training courses.

The campaign achieved what it did because, for a moment, an alliance came into being of lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals — all of whom were united by being psychotherapists with a concern for social responsibility. As indicated, the problems have not gone away and PCSR will undoubtedly need to re-enter the area in the future.

If you would like to make a contribution towards the expenses incurred in running this campaign, please make out a cheque to the Homosexuality and Psychotherapy Study Group and send it to the Steering Committee, 148 Mercers Road, London N19 4PX.

The other members of the Steering Committee were Sally Berry, Chess Denman, Mary Lynne Ellis, Marion Gow and Tom Ryan.

If you would like a fuller report, write to the Steering Committee at the above address and enclose a 50p s.a.e.