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# Bright future seen

Global gay conference draws record attendance

**A**s the 11th World Conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) wound to a close in Vienna Jul 22, organizers pronounced the week-long gathering successful beyond their highest expectations. Bouquets and potted plants were given to almost everyone and the thank-you's delayed lunch by an hour.

The reasons for the success were several-fold, according to ILGA officers and Homosexual Initiative (HOSI) Vienna, which organized this year's gathering. But they said a few statistics demanded particular notice.

It was the largest ILGA conference ever—260 participants. More countries attended than ever before—33. Activists from some of the world's poorest gay and lesbian rights groups came from five Latin American nations. And five East European nations were represented by a total of 20 activists.

Also of note was the participation of 21 activists from the USA. Although Americans have overlooked ILGA in the past, several observers predicted that the National Gay and Lesbian Task force, the Human Rights Campaign Fund and similar US groups will probably finally take the plunge at next year's conference in Stockholm.

Among the notable decisions of conference plenary sessions was the sending of a telegram to Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Nicaraguan revolution.

"The brave people of Nicaragua and the Sandinista government have undertaken great sacrifice and shown tremendous bravery in fighting for basic human rights for all



**We are everywhere.** Jorge Romero of Mexico (upper left) and unidentified delegates from (clockwise) Yugoslavia's *Lezbiska Sekcija*, Peru's Homosexual Liberation Pride Movement and Hungary's Homeros Lambda. Photos by Rex Wockner.

their people," the conference said. "We hope that these rights will be fully extended to lesbian and gay citizens."

New official ILGA protests were undertaken to combat sodomy laws in the Australian states of Queensland and Tasmania. Other protests will target human rights abuses and harassment of gays in Argentina and the Canary Islands.

The embassies and governments of Bulgaria, Rumania and

Czechoslovakia were also put on the ILGA action list. Member groups intend to bombard officials of the three countries with inquiries about HIV antibody testing and about the social status of gays and lesbians.

Activists from Barcelona, Spain's Catalunya Gay Liberation Front, drafted and saw passed a Charter of Rights for the Free Expression of Homosexual Practice. Irish participants, meanwhile, received a pledge of international support in their bat-

tle to force Ireland to honour a recent European Court for Human Rights decision overturning the country's sodomy law.

A huge and complex fight took place behind the scenes at this year's conference over whether the European Economic Community should be lobbied on social issues such as lesbian and gay rights. Northern European activists are afraid that any Europe-wide standardization of gay rights protections

will move some countries backwards. Southern European nations, such as Spain, Italy and Greece, said their northern neighbours were being self-centred and that the social unification of Europe is inevitable. The matter was put to a vote and the northerners won.

The issue of age-of-consent laws and sex with or among children was discussed. In the end, a resolution

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## Out in the east

Gay liberation blossoms in Eastern Europe

**T**he 21 Eastern European delegates to July's 11th World Conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) in Vienna were grouped together because it was assumed they lived in similar circumstances at home. But it quickly became apparent that Hungary is not East Germany and is not Bulgaria.

Hungary has an official gay group which runs a discotheque for profit. In East Germany, most gay groups are under the protection of churches. Bulgaria has no gay movement, sent no delegates to the conference and is testing every citizen of the capital city, Sofia, for HIV antibodies.

Czechoslovakian delegates seemed relaxed about their social situation at home, but said they need letters and protests from outside the country. Yugoslavian delegates were chic and sleek, exuding confidence in their own abilities. Polish delegates were playful, confident and sassy, seemingly reflecting Poland's

rebirth. No one came from Rumania.

The East Germans and the Hungarians argued throughout the week over whether to refer to the East Bloc group as "Eastern Europe" or "socialist countries."

At one point, Hungary's Sándor Borsos accused East Berlin's Fred Beuchel of trying to "brainwash" ILGA delegates. Beuchel responded that if the Hungarians no longer considered themselves "socialists" then they could join a different subgroup of ILGA.

"Oh-oh, we're starting blackmail all of a sudden," interrupted workshop chair Grada Schadee of the Netherlands.

In fact, whether or not Hungary is still a socialist nation is a question of interest. The border with Austria is wide open, causing East Germany to restrict travel to Hungary for East Germans. And news broadcasts, translators assured this reporter, are presented without Communist Party bias.

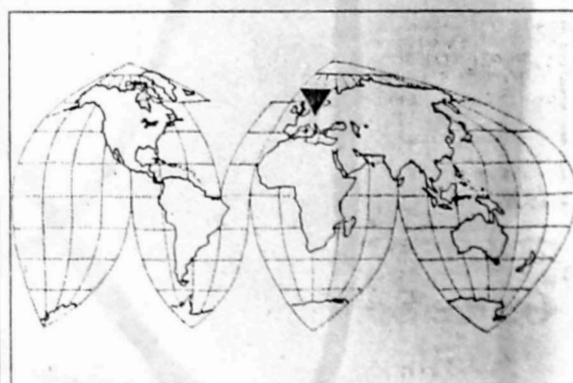
Here, then is a brief summary of the gay movement in the East Bloc:

**Bulgaria:** No gay movement exists. ILGA delegates from other East Bloc nations suggest that activists worldwide ask Bulgarian embassies how to contact Bulgaria's gay and lesbian population. Activists should also ask openly gay elected officials in the West (such as Svend Robinson) to make inquiries via official channels.

**Czechoslovakia:** Lambda/Prague is a year-and-a-half old and has 62 members. The group runs a gay switchboard and provides counselling on social, legal and health matters. Other activities include concerts, gay films, private video parties and disco parties. The group is continuing its drive for official recognition. Hotline number: 011-42-2-527-388. Address: Lambda Praha, c/o Lány, Pod Kotlářkou 14, CS-150 00 Prague 5 Smichov, Czechoslovakia.

**East Germany:** Twenty working groups affiliated with the Evangeli-

## World News



cal Church and 11 gay and lesbian clubs are active in the German Democratic Republic. A national political group called "Courage" is six months old and has 60 active members. Activists recently "came out publicly with an information stall," according to spokesperson Beuchel. The group has received extensive media coverage. Address: AG Homosexualität Courage (FDJ), PSF 21, DDR-1058 Berlin, German Democratic Republic. Gay community telephone contact: Peter Sedler at 011-37-4-376428.

**Lesbians have formed separate organizations within the Evangelical Church in several cities.** Activist Birgit Neumann from the city of Halle says the "exodus of the women (from the gay groups) expresses the growing sensibility for their own questions and necessities." No address is available. Mail to any East German group will likely be read by authorities.

**Hungary:** HOMEROS Lambda is more than a year old and is the

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# Poverty & politics

Latin American gays lack resources



## World News

**L**atin American activists attending the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) 11th World Conference Jul 17-22 in Vienna all told an identical story: They have hundreds of ideas for bringing gay liberation to their countries, but no money for anything but the smallest of projects.

Gay and lesbian groups came to Vienna from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru. At the first Latin American workshop, they detailed the important undertakings that have been put on hold: newsletters, newspapers, hotlines, AIDS services, office space—even telephone calls and stamps to stay in touch with each other.

Jorge Romero Mendoza, from Guadalajara, Mexico's Homosexual Pride Liberation Group (GOHL), said his organization has yet to recover from a bomb which destroyed the facade of the GOHL community centre last March. The bomb was most likely planted by homophobes who believe gays brought AIDS to Mexico, Romero said. Since the explosion, GOHL has been unable to pay its rent or phone bill, and the group's disco has closed.

Still, Romero said GOHL members are hopeful and are moving forward with plans to host ILGA's 1991 conference. "I think we can do it," he said. "The governor of the

province promised his help, as well as the mayor."

Mexico City was represented in Vienna by, among others, Carlos Hernandez of the group Cálamó, which provides legal, psychological, cultural and medical support to the gay male population of the world's largest city.

Cálamó, too, is broke and has suspended plans to open "an alternative space," publish a magazine and add a "human rights defence wing" to the organization.

The good news from Mexico City is that AIDS has created a climate where "homosexuality" is discussed in the media without negativity for the first time," Hernandez said.

Colectivo Sol works on AIDS issues in Mexico City and was represented at the conference by Raphael Manrique-Soto.

"What we're doing now," Manrique-Soto said, "is putting emphasis in rescuing the positive side of sex for gay men, because we think the reaction against AIDS has replaced the whole idea of feeling guilty about sex."

Other Mexican groups in attendance included the AIDS organiza-

tions Voz Humana (Human Voice) and Mexicans Against AIDS, as well as Guerilla Gay, an organization which, according to representative Marco Osorio, "tries to raise the consciousness of those who go to bars via ... workshops on sexology, homosexuality and lust."

From Peru came MOHL, the Homosexual Pride Liberation Movement. Spokeswoman "Rebeca" told conferees that social pressure in Peru forces many gay men and lesbians into heterosexuality marriages.

The gay movement has been disrupted since 1980 by a civil war that has taken ten thousand lives, Rebeca said, "and the sensationalism and disinformation of AIDS has created a huge panic, so that gay and lesbian people have, for example, been expelled from hospitals."

Still, there are 12 gay discos in Lima, Rebeca said, one of them exclusively for women, and MOHL is an official registered organization. "However," she added, "it's only registered under its initials and the authorities don't know what the 'H' stands for." The group offers medical and legal assistance, HIV and other medical testing, and operates an information centre.

Chile was represented by "Lilian" of the lesbian-feminist group Ayuquelen. She said there are not gay male activists in Chile because men are afraid to come out of the closet.

"We work underground," Lilian said, "workshops on consciousness, lesbian sports clubs. Thanks to (money from) ILGA, our bulletin is almost ready to come out. It will be called Corrientes de aire (Air Currents)."

There is no treatment available in Chile for persons with AIDS, according to Ayuquelen. "If they are among the few who have money, they go to a private hospital," Lilian said. "Otherwise, they go home."

Still, Lilian said AIDS at least offers hope of some organizing by gay men, "but only purely around medical issues."

Santiago has one gay bar that, at press time, had not yet been closed by authorities.

Representing Brazil was Antonia Luiz of the group Atobá. Although the organization is multi-faceted, Luiz said he was proudest of the group's distribution of condoms in gay male bars and "cruising places."

Brazil has more than 100 gay/lesbian organizations which hold an annual conference every January in Rio de Janeiro.

Finally, Argentina's Comunidad

Homosexual Argentina (CHA) was represented by Emmanuel Valido. Although the socio-political climate for gays and lesbians is bad throughout Latin America, the horror stories told by Valido lead to the conference's only demonstration, at the Argentine embassy in Vienna.

According to activists, police regularly back paddy wagons up to the front doors of gay and lesbian bars and discos, and arrest everyone inside, holding them in jail for up to 72 hours. Gay men are also routinely arrested on the street for allegedly "inviting a sexual act in public."

"All it takes is to be standing on the corner with your hands in your pockets," Valido said. "The police say you were playing with yourself through your pocket and inviting sex. Or, if you scratch your ear, they say it was a signal to another man."

CHA is months behind on its rent, electricity and taxes, and desperately needs condoms which, according to Valido, are so expensive, that less than one percent of gay men can buy them.

For addresses, phone numbers or bank account numbers of any of the Latin American organizations, consult the Spartacus international gay guide or write Rex Wockner c/o Outlines, 1300 W Belmont 3-E, Chicago, IL 60657 USA.

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only officially registered gay group in the East Bloc. Activists operate a bar/disco/leather bar complex called Lokál and have received extensive media coverage in Hungary's increasingly free press. Gay activists are free to travel to the West and do so regularly. The group has 600 members and hosted an ILGA East Bloc conference last April. Tel: 011-36-1-414315 or 011-36-1-377173. Address: HOMEROS Lambda, kerteszi u 51, H-1070 Budapest, Hungary. No need to worry about mail being intercepted.

**Poland:** Despite virulent opposition from the Catholic Church, groups in Warsaw, Wrocław and Gdansk have been thriving for three years. The Wrocław activists concentrate on showing films about gay life and

gay problems, according to spokesperson Ryszard Ziobra. In Warsaw, Warszawski Ruch Homoseksualny collects condoms from the West and distributes them to Polish gays. In Gdansk, a small newsletter called Filo is being published. Wrocław tel: 011-48-71-249-021. Addresses: (1) Grupa ETAP, PO Box 812, PC-50-950 Wrocław 2, Poland. (2) FILO, c/o Kisiel, PO Box 577, PL-80-958 Gdansk 50, Poland. (3) Grezgorz Watkowski, Broniewskiego 11 m 16, PL-01-780 Warsaw, Poland.

**Romania:** No gay movement exists. ILGA delegates from other East Bloc national suggest that activists worldwide ask Rumanian embassies how to contact Rumania's gay and lesbian population. Hungary's Borsos said that "two years ago there was a crackdown like in the Middle Ages, with torture, suicides and lives ruined. Many Rumanian gays are seeking refuge in Hungary," he said. Activists ask that openly gay politicians in the West inquire officially about these reports.

**Yugoslavia:** There are two groups in Yugoslavia's most cosmopolitan city, Ljubljana—the gay organization Magnus and Lezbiska Sekcija. The women organized a film festival late last year. Women's tel: 011-38-41-235990. Address for both groups: Lezbiska Sekcija/Magnus, Kersnikova 4, YU-61000 Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.

Activists with ILGA's Eastern European Information Pool, located at Homosexual Initiative Vienna, say they are ecstatic about the East Bloc's "aspiring lesbian and gay movement" and the "constant good news" emanating from behind the so-called Iron Curtain. East Bloc regional ILGA conferences will be held in Budapest in 1990, East Berlin in 1991 and Prague in 1992.

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passed stating that "existing same-sex age-of-consent laws often operate to oppress and not to protect." ILGA member organizations were urged "to consider how best children, adolescents and people of all ages can be empowered and supported against both sexual coercion and sexual oppression."

England's Lisa Power and West Germany's Jean-Claude Letist were re-elected ILGA secretaries-general while Sweden's David Murphy will take over as information secretary. Guadalajara, Mexico was chosen to host the 1991 conference; the 1992 gathering will be in Brussels, Belgium. A European regional conference is scheduled for late December in Athens, Greece, and an Asian regional conference will be held in August 1990 in Bangkok, Thailand.

□ REX WOCKNER



**We remember.** Delegates to the 11th World Conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association inspected the remains of a Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen, outside of Vienna. Mauthausen is the only such camp with a memorial to homosexual victims. The pink granite memorial reads: "Beaten to death. Silenced to death. The homosexual victims of National Socialism. The Austrian Homosexual Initiative, 1984." Photo by Rex Wockner.