

FROM MONTGOMERY TO STONEWALL



[1986]

IN 1955 WHEN ROSA PARKS sat down and began the Montgomery Bus Protest, if anyone had said that it would be the beginning of a most extraordinary revolution, most people, including myself, would have doubted it.

But revolutionary beginnings are often unpredictable. Consider, for example, Russia. In 1917 Lenin was in Switzerland writing a book indicating that the Russian Revolution could not possibly begin before 1925. Then, a most unusual thing happened. Some women in a factory were cold, and to warm themselves they decided to go out into the street and parade around the plaza. Some Russian soldiers, upon seeing these women, assumed that they were making a protest and joined them. Thus the Russian Revolution began!

Consider now gay rights. In 1969, in New York of all places, in Greenwich Village, a group of gay people were in a bar. Recall that the 1960s was a period of extreme militancy—there were antiwar demonstrations, civil rights demonstrations, and women's rights demonstrations. The patrons of the bar added gay rights demonstration to the list. The events began when several cops moved into the bar to close it down, a very common practice in that period, forcing many gay bars to go underground. The cops were rough and violent, and, for the first time in the history of the United States, gays, as a collective group, fought back—and not just that night but the following night, and the next, and the night after that.

That was the beginning of an extraordinary revolution, similar to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in that it was not expected that anything

