

Coming out in Australia

Dennis Altman

Have just given a talk on Gay Liberation to the local, and first, Australian homophile organisation, *CAMP, Inc.* Which stands for Campaign Against Moral Persecution, Incorporated, "camp" being the Australian equivalent of "gay", and is a homophile group more like Mattachine or D.O.B. than it is a liberation movement.

Camp Inc. was established last year by a small group, including some straights; the most active of the founding members has subsequently become the de facto full time director. It got considerable media publicity, despite the apparent decision of the two largest newspapers in Sydney to ignore it. (The New York correspondent of one of these papers has told me of the difficulties of getting permission to report on gay liberation activities in America.) More importantly it has attracted a substantial membership and branches have been established in other Australian cities.

Any movement must be understood in relation to the society in which it exists, and Australia has neither a history of homophile organisations - Mattachine, after all, goes back twenty years - nor a radical movement of anything like the same size and intensity of that in America. Thus *Camp Inc.* cannot be judged by American standards and what may seem conservative, even reactionary, by New York expectations is not so in Australia.

Camp Inc. is predominantly a male, middle-class and "respectable" organisation, embracing a wide range of ages and a lesser range of life styles. There are few "heads" or "freaks" although a number have been coming to its dances. By and large the more active members are likely to "pass" as straight in most situations - and want it that way.

The position of homosexuals in Australia seems to me both better and worse than in America. Worse because there is a far more restricted "gay

world", an almost non-existent gay press - *Camp Inc.* produces a monthly journal - and an official ideology of repression. Better because that ideology is not much translated into practice, and in some ways there seems more acceptance here than there. Particularly, I suspect, among the younger left.

Camp Inc.'s main function so far has been as a social body. The organisation has leased an old house in an inner city suburb - opposite the local police station and next to the fire station - which has a very big back garden, complete with banana trees, and is superb for parties, meetings etc. Dances here compete successfully with the commercial places, though attracting far too few women.

Out of the socialising, however, has come a fair amount of rapping - there are special times for women and married homosexuals, the house is open every night for coffee, and there are attempts to get more discussions organised. (So far people shy off the idea of consciousness raising.) But as yet very little action, though a Law Reform Committee has been discussing possibilities for some time.

Why? Well for a start very few members are prepared to come out publicly, which makes demonstrations or "zaps" very hard to organise. This is in turn a reflection of the sort of people who belong to *Camp Inc.* Few of them are used to demonstrations, even fewer feel able to be very open about their homosexuality.

This will change: already there seems much greater freedom among *Camp Inc.* members in dealing with friends, relatives, jobs. "We must free ourselves first" - and this is particularly true for us in Australia, which is a small, integrated society compared with the anonymity and diversity of New York. Rap groups, even parties, have considerable value for us

But to return to my talk: this was the third I've given recently on Gay Liberation. One - on a fairly theoretical level - was received with somewhat subdued approval by a mixed group of marxists and anarchists. (The local Communists, unlike their

American counterparts, are incidentally quite favorable to Gay and Women's Liberation, though I would wonder about their motives.) A local Women's Liberation group held a very well attended discussion, and most of the women were both enthusiastic and aware. The reaction at *Camp Inc.* was more guarded, but more receptive, frankly, than I'd expected.

The sense of gay pride, of gay community that seem to me the essence of Gay Liberation, they are being born here in Australia too. So, too, we are gradually building a sense of gay consciousness. There is still considerable suspicion of the radical image with which Gay Liberation is associated, for this is both a more conservative and less polarised country than yours. Yet there are signs that people want more than dances, that apathy may yet be translated into anger.

Comparatively few women have joined *Camp Inc.* though as everywhere else they need its social functions far more than the men. The women who are around have so far seemed hostile to Women's Liberation - though contacts are being made, guardedly - and strongly opposed to any sort of separatist movement. (Men are invited to their caucus.) Whether this will change as their own women's consciousness changes I don't know. I hope not. It seems to me that one of the most important features of the gay movement is that it brings women and men together and breaks down the sexual segregation that a sexist society has laid on gay people.

There's also a branch of *Camp Inc.* at Sydney University (and possibly soon at others.) So far it hasn't got much beyond rapping, though a projected "parent's night" next term should prove interesting.

A gay movement has got off the ground in Sydney and has involved several hundreds of people, all in less than a year. In itself that's quite an achievement. Remember that when we say "we're everywhere" we're here too, in Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne, and soon other cities.

Coming into London

Warren Singer

Traveling around Europe and North Africa for six months this year I learned that Americans are not the most beloved people in the world. They are hated for being imperialists fascists, and chauvinists, but mostly for the schmucks that come over every summer. Being a Jewish homosexual I luckily belonged to two international groups which weren't as hostile to the fact that I was born to the wrong side of the ocean.

At the beginning of July I met two sisters from New York City. They were old friends and together we went to Amsterdam, Paris, and finally London. It was fantastic to be in London after the *Harry's Back East* scene in Amsterdam and Paris. London GLF was still functioning, growing, and going strong as compared to some of its sibling organizations in the states. They held meetings weekly, maintain an office, run consciousness-raising groups, hold demonstrations and a number of other things. They have good attendance at meetings with usually around 200 people showing up.

Politically though they were about six months to a year behind the gay movement in the states in working with sexism. When I was there there were two important issues dealing with this, of primary importance was dealing with sexism in GLF. I remember we decided to divide into groups at one meeting and talk about it. It generally worked out that a lot of the groups were all men, which is something not to be desired in a discussion of this sort. In the group in which I was there were other

sexist they were. After this support was printed in the GLF newspaper, *Come Together*, without support from the general meeting, many people objected especially the women because they couldn't support such a sexist rag. There were men and one sister, an American. As we talked she was constantly shouted down, cut into, and ignored; a prime example occurred in which one of the men asked her a question and another wouldn't let her speak and answered for her. She did not though allow herself to be cut out and by the end of the meeting our group proposed to the general meeting that the women should automatically get all the vote. This caused a great stir which led to the women planning to meet of their own and decide what they want.

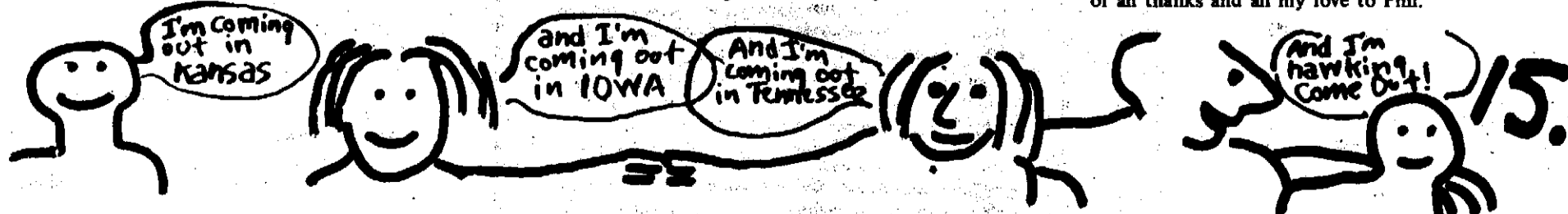
Another great problem that happened involved the "Oz" trials. "Oz" is a straight underground magazine which showed blatant sexism against women and gays in many of its articles and pictures. They were brought up on charges of obscenity because of an issue directed at children. GLF had originally voiced support for "Oz" because of fear involving precedents in censorship cases and because one of the editors was gay. I also tend to believe among many of the men it involved the need among them to show their kinship with their radical straight brothers regardless of how

many long and bitter debates on this topic which didn't do much, but that did bring to many people's eyes the sexism in themselves and in "Oz."

GLF was very much like GAA here in New York in holding frequent zaps, I went to one which had a turnout of about 40 on a weekday protesting the anti-gay policies of the London newspapers, which in general have the content quality of somewhere between the *daily News* and the *National Enquirer*. They also had a couple of others. They were planning a big demo on August 28th, to protest the laws concerning the age of consent and how they discriminate against youth. In England and Wales homosexual acts between consenting adults in private is allowed.

All together though the GLFers in London were a breather compared to the closetness of the continent. One of the American sisters and I had no place to stay and were gladly put up by members. In the organization there is a group working hard to try to eradicate the sexism of the organization. As in all these GLF organizations there is a small group who are very involved and do much of the work, and those who come to cruise; however, I found very little rip-off artists and hustlers that were attracted to many of the gay organizations here. Maybe that is why they are still in existence.

A special thanks to Aubrey, Carla, David, Barbara, Mick and everyone else in GLF. And most of all thanks and all my love to Phil.



Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation
by Dennis Altman
Reviewed by Andrew Dvosin

First, general impressions:

Nobody's going to stay up all night to read this one at a gulp, because it's heavy. Dennis Altman, a 27-year old Australian political scientist who's taught at N.Y.U., Adelphi and now the University of Sydney, got into gay lib while he was here to teach and study, and as he puts it in what is probably the book's only witty or concise remark, "Bring an academic and a movement together and one produces a book."

The book Altman, as I must call him (hateful to call a gay brother that way by his last name; it creates a straight, depersonalized, and competitive N.Y. Times Book Reviewer's head) has produced is a learned thesis on how we got to where we are; i.e., why a gay liberation movement at this particular time.

To this end, straight prophets of sexual liberation (Freud, Reich, Norman O. Brown, Marcuse, and one semi-gay Paul Goodman) are invoked by the shelf full, and what they have to say is interesting, somewhat (of which, more later).

But from a book whose subtitle is "Oppression and Liberation" one expects some of the stuff of life, too; the sense of what it means to be gay here, now, in an oppressive straight world, and this comes not from abstract theory, but from personal testimony and experience. I feel that this is what it is important to write about, since we all, even at this point, still take for granted, are barely aware of, so much of the shit, so many of the limitations that straight society lays on us. Of such testimony, there is very little in this book.

(That Altman didn't intend to write that sort of book I know, but inevitably my reactions to the book he did write are colored by what I expect from a book on gay liberation, and to report otherwise would be dishonest).

The book's style would do credit to any political science scholarly journal, I suppose; being full of lumps of clotted, inexpressive prose such as this: "to change consciousness in an underdeveloped and once neo-colonial state like Cuba must in some ways reverse the changes applicable to North America/Western Europe/Australasia." Oi vey, Dennis!

New as to specific ideas: which I'll try to react to out of my experience as one gay person:

The big, new idea in the book is that gay liberation is "the child of the counter-culture," i.e., or rock, drugs, of living not to work but to live, of all that has happened to American youth culture in the last ten years. This is discussed in the chapter "America, The Counter-Culture and Gay Liberation," in which increased technology is seen as having made obsolescent the Puritan virtues of continence, competitiveness, etc. Rock in particular as a cultural phenomenon, Altman feels, has softened the super-rigid male/female dichotomy that afflicted America.

How to know if this is true? Practically speaking, do I as a gay person feel more comfortable standing next to or talking with a straight rock freak as opposed to a straight corporate type. Yes, but only slightly, and given this test, Altman's explanation would seem to have less than total validity.

The Book's political viewpoint is radical: gay liberation demands a revision of society rather than an incorporation into it. On the one hand, gay liberation's essential quality "lies in its assertion of gayness, its refusal to feel shame or guilt at being homosexual...the real oppression we suffer is psychological."

But, in two chapters entitled "Towards a Polymorphous Whole" and "The End of the Homosexual," Altman recognizes that as long as a minority greatly differs from the majority, it will continue to be oppressed by that majority, which it frightens: "Unlike other minorities, we lie within the oppressor himself."

For this reason, gay liberationists will, along with women's lib, have to shoulder the straight man's burden, so to speak, carving out a world and an existence where there are no sexual roles, there is no straight and gay, etc. This is implicit in Altman's statement that "It may be the historic function of the homosexual to...accept his/her heterosexuality as well, and bring to its logical conclusion the Freudian belief in our inherent bisexuality."

Such a society would increasingly be based on communal living, in which children would be free from the mad possessiveness of parents, which they later copy, and in which male children in particular

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would no longer be inculcated with the macho ethic which has so fucked up the world.

This is all heavy stuff, and we all damn well know that it's not going to happen tomorrow. Meanwhile, I've seriously contemplated adopting a male child, because I dig them, and they dig me. But I wince when I think how the son that's grown up with me will suffer when he comes into contact with his little macho equivalents on the block or in school. So maybe we do need communal living now - those of us gay people who dig raising kids - to create an atmosphere with more human values for both kids and adults.

On sexual roles, within the gay world as it is right now: some of us are into drag, some of us into leather, some of us, like me, dally with both. Altman sees both of these as examples of gay people's internalizations of straight society's insistence on rigidly different personalities for a man and a woman. Perhaps it's more complicated: for me, becoming "feminine" has been a way of making myself more expressive, an escape from the arid macho closet I was in for so many years.

And S&M may be some gay people's way of coping with the frighteningly new phenomenon of love between two totally equal males, via slave-master roles (heterosexuals have never had totally equal relationships, as it has been understood, at least by straight males, that the woman is in some sense always subservient to the man.)

Finally, the whole matter of separatism and our relations to straight people. Altman comments on how paranoid gay people can get if they totally isolate themselves from straights, how all straight people thus become seen as the enemy, regardless of their personal views. All right, this month a very dear straight friend of mine of ten years standing is getting married, at his mother-in-law's house. So I go, but do I wear my "Gay Revolution" button, which I wear to work and everywhere else, do I bring another gay male and dance with him (if I can do my thing, I don't begrudge them their thing)? Do I do this and upset her conservative Catholic parents, whom I'll never see again, on this so terribly important day to them. Or shall I be a good boy, and by suppressing myself be miserable that day? Not a major crisis in the revolution, but of such stuff are a gay person's relationships with straights made.

Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation takes a long, composed view of things, and there's something to be said for trying to see the gay revolution in a historical context of changing ideas and social mores. But to write so is to distance oneself emotionally from the movement and its brothers and sisters. There is little passion, little outrage in the book, and not too much manifest love. It's painful to have to write this about a gay brother who's sweated to articulate his vision of the movement, but it's true, it's true. Scholarship there is aplenty, along with some perceptive thinking.

Impressive, but don't bother cruising her, as we used to say of the more aloof numbers at Julius' in pre-liberation days.

Arthur Bell, one of the founders of the Gay Activists Alliance, has also published a book called "Dancing the Gay Lib Blues". The book was not reviewed in this issue of *Come Out!* because we could not come across a review we felt we could publish. We did not review the book ourselves because we felt that someone with a more intimate familiarity with the events described in the book should review it. Our action is in no way related to an evaluation of the book. The book poses an important question: Can there be Gay Liberation without Gay consciousness? We invite a review of the book from our readers.

Homosexual Liberation
a personal view
by John Murphy

reviewed by
Steve Gavin

John Murphy's *Homosexual Liberation* is the best book I have yet read dealing with the Gay Liberation movement and published via the straight media. It presents Gay Liberation from an essential vantage point, the developing Gay consciousness. It points out to Gay men just out of the closet that there are many other closets thru which they must travel.

The book is basically geared to middle class men, and there lies its basic fault. Contrary to middle class assertions having an advanced degree is not an asset to self-liberation. On the contrary, intellectualization is a sophisticated form of closetry. All of our "educational" institutions are thoroughly drenched in sexism. Being part of a consciousness raising group all of whose members have graduate school training is not the asset John would have us believe. Middle class men are ill at ease in expressing love for each other not in spite of graduate school training but because of graduate school training. It's not so much that John implies the former ---though he gives me that impression off and on throughout the book--- it's that he doesn't seem to appreciate the latter.

Basically the book is geared to this level. It is telling middle class America that they need not worry about Gay Liberation, that with the right perspective the Gay Liberation movement is compatible with middle class values. And, unfortunately, at the stage the movement is in now, he is basically right.

John appears much too sheltered from the movement. He never stayed with one movement group long enough to appreciate the immense contradictions that must be resolved. While he dropped in, now and then, to the Gay Community Center, there were those who were trying to make the center work. The community center eventually folded.

Let me not give the impression by these criticisms that the book compares adversely with other books on Gay Liberation from the straight press. On the contrary, I consider this book light years ahead of any other men's book on Gay Liberation I have yet encountered. While many thousands of consciousness-miles have been traveled since the "gay is just as good as straight" period, John is still pointing in the right direction. The road to liberation winds thru the murky swamps encompassed by this book. For a Gay man beginning to establish his identity this book can be very valuable. Except for certain sections where John unearths closet skeletons of the literary past, the book provides interesting reading.

REMEMBER

*I remember when I used to be so lonely
that I felt like an animal deprived of its tribe
when I used to wonder what was hurting me when
I could only feel hurt
when fear was so natural that all I
could remember was fear
when I would watch the sun go down
after days of rusty razor blades
hoping that I too might be carried away
on the last sinking sigh of day
when memory was like a growing tree
that kills its branches
by blurring out the sky*

*I remember things as they used to be
it is good that they are over and more
has come to me, because loneliness is
not the ultimate destiny but is
another trick of the man who sits at his desk
and watches the clock*

Perry Brass