

I really intended to write something this issue about us and C.A.M.P., something about our relations with that organisation because the steady growth of a homosexual movement in Australia this year has raised some interesting ideological questions. Something, anyway, that might have been optimistic, might have turned us on...but it'll have to wait.

I'm compelled, you see, to write a bit of a downer -- about what a lot of people on the periphery of the movement might think is trivia -- but there are certain things going on in the Sydney Gay Liberation group that are giving me the shits. I hope, though, it'll ultimately be constructive, not just seen as an angry, bitter piece (though I am still partly feeling those emotions).

A distinction first. It seems pretty obvious to me that "gay liberation" can describe the process whereby individual homosexual people can set about changing their self-perception in a society where the prevailing values are anti-homosexual. As one of our first handouts went "...we all realise we can be our own worst enemies, for we too have internalised the norms and values of this society, which are anti-homosexual..." Call this process a "change of consciousness" if you like. I'd argue that this process can probably only take place in the context of a movement which among other things provides a basis for a coherent attack on institutionalised oppression and is emotionally supportive for its members who are trying to change their old self-perception, trying to work through their internalised oppression. And it's obvious that this movement will have some concrete organisational form. Thus, "gay liberation" becomes Gay Liberation. I hope my distinction emphasises that I don't equate a personal change of consciousness with the movement -- the two are interdependent, complementary.

I wouldn't want to argue either that there is (or ought to be) common agreement on precisely what form these more concrete manifestations of gay liberation ought to take but, and this gets to the whole point of my article, I don't believe we've ever really thought about, talked enough about, in a constructive way what are our most basic problems: the form, dynamics, and the inter-relationships of that thing we call Sydney Gay Liberation.

Ever since that little group (and it indeed was then) set out from Camp early this year, we've stumbled along...not quite knowing what we ought to be doing... We all "knew", you see, that we couldn't stand it anymore in that organisation; we were "radical, anti-authoritarian, etc., etc." but we never collectively analysed that. Then, I think, we began to define what we ought to be doing, in "outward-looking", public terms: activities notched up (marches, demos, etc.). This theme of what Sydney Gay Lib was "doing" -- in a public sense -- has continued to pervade our thinking to the present day.

(It was even argued by some that the mere involvement in these "public" activities by people in the group would resolve our difficulties in relating to one another...)

Later on, when we were still having severe problems of an inter-group kind, we did make some sort of attempt to "improve communications" -- not that we ever really defined what that meant -- by breaking up into small groups, and we tried the idea of a permanent G.L. phone and though that proved to be an enormous success in that public sense -- enquires all the time from groups, people outside the movement -- about half the members of Sydney G.L. have never rung it, sometimes concurrently complaining of "not knowing what was going on"! Mind you, in a wider sense, I'd view certain developments as achievements -- the beginnings of the newsletter, to date the only written material from Gay Liberation in Australia. And the possibility that the Gay Lib Centre -- with all its potential functions -- will become a reality.

But the problem is that virtually all the developments of recent months, which ever came to fruition, were initiated, fostered, followed up by Robert Tucker and myself...

I'm sorry if you're left gasping by what appears to be my gross immodesty, my outrageous claim, but I think it'd be bullshit for me to disclaim this. Not for accolades, though, as I hope you'll see if you haven't been too put off to read on...

My seemingly intemperate claims get right to the heart of what I think is ailing. For Sydney Gay Liberation has always depended on a few people to meet any agreed ends... Before these de facto leadership roles passed almost exclusively to Robert Tucker and myself, it was Pam Stein and Tony Crewes (now both departed) with Robert, myself and John Storey as subsidiaries.

What I want to argue is that apart from the destructive emotional effects this had on the people playing these roles, the perpetuation of this system of de facto leaders will only lead to continuing major problems for the growth of the group -- on every level.

But our conditioning runs deep — there's twenty-odd years of it to get over. Despite the fact that I've come out, have thought and talked now a lot about society's ideological bullsh~~i~~ in relation to homosexuality, there are still plenty of dark moments when I feel very unsure. And it's then that I realise how powerful our conditioning has been...

John Lee