

Women together, women laughing, women in pain, women under the looking glass, women relating, women loving - glad to be women, glad to be gay!

RADICALESBIAN weekend

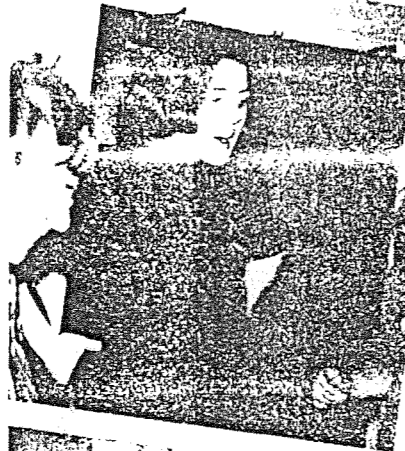
Sixty women, from Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra, came together this weekend for a conference, organised by the Melbourne Radicalesbians, at a Sorrento guest-house. Because we reject rigid organisation, the structure was loose - no roneoed sheets telling us where we should be and what we should talk about - yet it was heavy, ideas shooting out all the time, sometimes too personal, sometimes too political, sometimes a breathtaking synthesis.

The first paper, by Kerryn, questioned the ordinary concept of sexuality, suggesting that it is usually defined in genital terms. Yet surely sexuality is primarily energy within all of us, and cannot be put in boxes or shut away in bedrooms. Sexuality is a part of the totality of what we are, part of a dynamic process which can't be separated off from the rest, although the way we live certainly makes it hard not to: "a place for everything and everything in its place."

From this, a discussion of the word "lesbian" was necessary, for surely this label concentrates, once again on genital sexuality, putting fucking first and excluding warm and real sisterhood which is non-genital. Gayness is a consciousness - knowing that we love our sisters, and that since relating demands openness and warmth and equality, it is more likely that we will only be able to relate totally to women. A man cannot love that which he considers less than himself.

However, "lesbian" has political importance since it is a word which keeps us in line. No more: We are unafraid of your labels - we are proud that we love our sisters. As Barbara's paper put it, we will "turn the fan around" and send your shit back - its your turn to cope with it.

PAGE 12



The papers on dependence and primary relationships again brought home the glorification of genital contact. Why is it that our sexual relationships create the most hassles, the most ambivalence, the most insecurity? We never question the love of our friends, never think about ceasing to love them or fear their rejection of us. We never have to make these relationships enduring, never make promises or create impossible expectations. Why must the one we sleep with be the best, the "closest", the most frightening? Genital contact is seen as the supreme intimacy, yet we all know that it can often be the most alienating of contacts. If we think that monogamy and the nuclear family are oppressive institutions, it is necessary to understand why they are so hard to get rid of in our own relationships. For some of us at the conference, the primacy given to genital sexuality provided the key to this understanding.

During the whole weekend, the conflict between the theoretical and the practical/emotional was often present, and difficult to cope with. We are in for a lot of pain, a lot of trying, a lot of contradictions - most of us were aware of this - many frowns, many slips, many clashes:

"May my hives bloom bravely until my flesh is aflame and burns through the cobwebs. May we go mad together, my sisters, May our labor agony in bringing forth this revolution be the death of all pain."

Robin Morgan.

But the pain at Sorrento wasn't only from within us. Several little kids were also at the guesthouse and although attracted by our smiles, had obviously been warned against us:

at Sorrento

"We're not allowed to talk to you - you're bad women". They hung out of windows yelling: "you disgusting rude things." Hell, some of us have kids, and all of us love them!

We are today's witches, hated, feared. We are sad when it comes from the mouths of babes; but we are angry, we are proud.

Enough of us have been burnt, enough killed and maimed.

Chris' paper emphasised the need for action, we have been invisible in this male-oriented world for too long. Many ideas were talked about:

- a commemoration day for our sisters burnt at the stake during witch-hunts;
- the establishment of women's "halfway" houses and the opening of our own homes to women leaving parents and husbands who have nowhere to go;
- compiling a list of names of people who can help share the responsibility for our sister's children;
- learning about feminist history and the women who never made it -

in short, seizing upon every opportunity to reach others, in prisons, in mental homes, in suburbia, through every means available - radio, papers, pamphlets, talking, demonstrating, etc.

Our theorizing, our coming together at places like Sorrento, demand that we act. We can't "lie in the arms of the individual solution" even though we recognize that we can't be honest in our political action unless we are also acting against our internalized oppressor.

Our power lies in our collective, leaderless, consciousness - this

PAGE 13



society doesn't know how to destroy it because it can never understand its principles.

And who is stronger than we who have born such hardship, so many beatings, so many frustrations yet still have not lost our love and compassion. Sorrento strengthened our sisterhood, our power and our determination.

KAREN

