

AUSTRALIA

# Gay power on the move

By a special reporter.

CAMP INK, the organisation whose principal aim is to "redefine the homosexual's place in society," has held its first general meeting — in a suburban church hall on a wet Sunday night.

I arrive alone, expecting to meet some friends. It was a fairly standard hall, rather austere and bleak. On entering, however, I did not get that feeling I had got before on entering a camp bar or party (that cold appraisal of you as a bit of stud!); here I at least felt that I was more than a mere penis object. To the people there I was possibly a person with similar problems and similar interests. I was soon chatting to a man from Tasmania, who had specifically arranged his holidays in Sydney to coincide with the meeting.

The meeting was scheduled to start at 8 p.m., and I had arrived about a minute early. There were about 40 people there, mostly in groups chatting, and showing little inclination to get down to business. However, the next ten minutes saw the number double and, as if by common consent, people began to drift to the rows of chairs facing a long trestle table in the front of the hall. Three people seated themselves at the table; Ian, the chairman, and John Ware and Christabel Poll, two homosexuals who have spent the past eight months helping to get the group organised.

The chairman went through the usual preliminaries and intimated that CAMP INK, from being John and Christabel's baby, had now grown to such proportions that it should be properly con-

stituted and run itself. John Ware then outlined the major developments of the organisation to date. The amount of correspondence received indicated that interest in, and support for, the group was quite substantial and he felt that on these indications the group would probably grow quite rapidly.

Christabel Poll gave a very straight-from-the-shoulder talk, mainly to the girls present, in which she discussed several points raised in letters. She mentioned the uniqueness of CAMP INK in being the only organisation in the world to admit both male and female homosexuals and explained why, even though the law did not discriminate against lesbians (the old Queen Victoria story raised its usual laughs), there were important reasons for unity. For lesbians there was nothing like a gay world as the men knew it, with wine bars and acknowledged pick-up places. But despite these differences their problems were problems in common: problems of adjustment, problems of acceptance; and there was much to be gained by a "gay liberation front."

The treasurer, David, then outlined the financial and legal situations. With over 400 paid-up members, new members joining every week and all States apart from N.S.W. virtually untapped, the group was in a fairly healthy state. Many persons who wished to remain anonymous were willing to donate quite considerable amounts—obviously there was sympathy for the aims of the group in high places. Main expense at the moment was the production and distribution of the journal; current postage rates led to a sizable bill each issue.

CAMP INK had had amusing encounters with the State and Commonwealth bureaucracy; firstly in attempting to register the organisation (it is a non-profit organisation, but can it be classed as a charity or some form of welfare organisation?); then in dis-

cussions with the Taxation Department ("a what sort of organisation?"). There were no precedents for public-service clerks confronted with gay power on the move.

Probably the most important outcomes of the meeting were plans to set up fully operative groups in the other States (Victoria and Queensland are next in line, with Western Australia to follow) and the establishment of various committees to deal with what are felt to be the main areas of concern.

One such committee was the political-action committee, set up to co-ordinate political activity in general, to arrange legal aid for homosexuals in cases relating specifically to homosexuality and to look at the problem of law reform. With membership increasing as it is and sympathetic support coming from some Churches and from many liberal-minded organisations, and using the generally accepted but probably conservative estimate of one in 20, there is the possibility of the creation of a powerful minority pressure group.

Another committee established was the counselling group. The sort of services it would provide are among the most needed, since the tone of many letters coming in (and also apparently from calls to Life Line) indicate that there are many lonely homosexuals living in the suburbs and in country towns completely isolated from anyone with whom they can discuss their problems.

When the meeting closed, everyone stood round chatting. If they had served tea and bikkies it would have seemed just like a Church social gathering. There was a general atmosphere of bonhomie and a sense of achievement; if not with a job well done, then at least well under way.

An overall impression is firstly of the typically Australian way in which the whole thing was dealt with. There were no polemics, no dogmatising, just that "let's get on with the job" attitude which seems to characterise the Australian approach. It was as mundane as a Boy Scouts' bottle drive.

The 94 people at the meeting—"concerned heterosexuals" as well as male and female homosexuals—were certainly not a cross-section of the community, in that the lower working classes were noticeable by their absence, as were those who would consider themselves as Sydney's upper class. Indeed, it was in many ways that standard collection of educated, articulate, middle class and upper working class that one finds in most groups aimed at some aspect of social reform.

Toward the end of the evening one youngster confided to me how pleasant it was to be able to meet and talk with members of the opposite sex of his own age. Since he did not have to go through the pretence of not being homosexual, there was no constant fear that it would lead to a situation which he might not want to develop. For one young man, then, CAMP INK has proved to be a haven.



John Ware and Christabel Poll: CAMP INK was their baby.

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