

WHO IS THE OPPRESSOR: THE FAMILY, THE STATE?

The Unmentionable Vice
Michael Goodrich
Ross-Erikson (Santa Barbara,
California), 1979.
163 pages, with index and
bibliography; \$8.75.

Coming Out in the Seventies
Dennis Altman
Wild and Woolley
(Sydney, Australia), 1979.
312 pages; \$15.95.

Homosexuality and Liberation
Mario Mieli
Gay Men's Press (London), 1980.
247 pages with extensive Notes;
\$8.95 (U.S.).
(Available from Glad Day Books,
4 Collier St. Toronto, Canada.)

By George Smith

Gay life appears in the establishment media on those rare occasions when it counts as news: Anita Bryant's offensive; in Toronto, the police raids on *The Body Politic*, and a year later on the Barracks steam bath; and in Winnipeg, the arrest of a number of prominent men for allegedly buying sex from a well-organized group of young men and boys. (Lesbians, as might be expected, rarely make the news in a society committed to the exclusion of women.)

What these stories do not report on is the enormous political change that has come about in gay life since the heyday of the gay liberation movement in the early Seventies.

The early gay movement committed itself to the politics of personal liberation. For many gays this made it easier to come out to family and friends. But it also led to an unwarranted crusade against "the family" as the bastion of gay oppression. This kind of personal politics quickly reached its limit, however. Today gays in Canada still stand outside the social order — in spite of the criminal code amendments of 1969, and in spite of the inclusion of sexual orientation in human rights legislation in Quebec. The early gay movement, unfortunately, has had little, if any, effect on curbing the state's efforts to administer the sexual lives of people.

The spread of the gay movement,

George Smith is a PHD student in education at OISE.

moreover, has developed an ironic twist, especially in recent years. Early gay liberation ideology was grounded in a kind of left-wing, critical-theory orthodoxy (e.g. Marcuse) that held that the revolution would be a matter not of class, but of culture. "All power to the imagination!" It held firmly to the anti-imperialism of the U.S. anti-war movement and of Mao. It attempted a Reichian integration of Freud and Marx (Reich's homophobia notwithstanding). And it took seriously the sexual politics of feminism as a social critique. Overall, however, in terms of the everyday lives of gay people, what the movement has produced has been a spawning of gay businesses and the growth of gay religion.

These developments are not peculiar to Canada. A new edition of an international gay bar guide for lesbians has just been published. And in the U.S., the government has called upon the Metropolitan Community (gay) Church to help with the sponsorship and settle-



ment of gays arriving with the recent wave of political refugees from Cuba. The left-leaning zeal of the early gay liberation movement has produced a strangely secular revolution.

The realization of this fact was brought home again this summer with the abolition of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition in favour of a parliamentary lobby in Ottawa with strong ties to gay business. As the old order, in this fashion, gives way to the new, what is missing is any clear analysis or sense of direction. In France, there has been a revival of gay politics around writers like Michel Foucault and Guy Hocquenghem. In North America, however, gay intellectuals have been content to lead ivory-towered existences mainly within gay academic unions — politics being the farthest thing from their minds.

The same seems to be true in Australia. Dennis Altman's new book, *Coming Out in the Seventies*, is, as the title suggests, a return to the early politics of gay liberation. As a collection of Altman articles, interviews, and other memorabilia from roughly 1967 to 1977, it is a nostalgia trip: back to the days of the counter culture, back to the civil rights and anti-war movements, back to the debate about Freud and Marx. Like the period it represents, these themes run through the book as an ever-present background to the emergence of Altman's "Gay consciousness."

Typical of collections of this sort, the quality of the work is quite uneven. Some of the articles like "The Homosexual and the Family" (1974) or "The Homosexual Vision of E.M. Forster" (1977) are fairly carefully written. Others, like "Fear Loathing and Hepatitis" (1977), merely proclaim opinion as fact — the stock-in-trade of newspaper columnists. Overall, the book is more an autobiography of Altman than an intellectual history of gay liberation in the Seventies — something not all that strange given the personal politics of the period.

In an essay written as late as 1977 entitled "The State and the New Homosexual," Altman does not go much beyond Marcuse's writings of the early Sixties. There is, consequently, not even an inkling of Foucault's insight that it is the state, rather than the family, that organizes sexual oppression in a class society. This failure to see the state as the source of gay oppression probably led Edgar Friedenberg, in a recent review of the book, to wonder aloud how a gay writer could be so lacking in paranoia.

Mario Mieli's book, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, is a *cri du coeur* of an effeminate gay man — in this case, a drag queen. It demands sympathy and support. Effeminate men often bear the brunt of gay sexual oppression. This places them, as in the case of the Stonewall Riot which began the gay liberation movement in America, in the forefront of the attack on the state; and makes of them, as they see it, a truly revolutionary force.

What is important about Mieli's work is that it puts forward the view that homosexual desire is universal and, consequently, that it is the work of gay politics to liberate this desire in everyone — gay or straight! This position which is the theoretical touchstone of many gay liberation groups in Europe, especially Italy's *Fuori*, stands in marked contrast to the civil rights strategy of North American gays.

But the book, unfortunately, is more rhetoric than argument. While it makes a number of useful and interesting points, its analysis is unable