recommended against anti-body testing unless as a diagnostic aid during illness, as part of a properly planned research project endorsed by the AIDS councils, or as part of blood, tissue or organ donation procedures.

They also recommend that any healthy person who chooses to have the test be provided with information on the significance of the test, and that proper counselling and follow-up procedures be provided. This policy is in conflict with that of Professor David Pennington, chair of the government’s National AIDS Task Force, who has called for all people in high risk groups to be anti-body tested.

Altman spends a chapter on the apparent conflicts between community health and civil liberties, in particular focussing on the debates in America over whether gay male bath houses or saunas should be closed. I say apparent because, in my view, such solutions are, in most cases, not only a threat to civil liberties, they also don’t work, medically speaking. The evidence of past efforts to control syphilis effectively through the closing of brothels and increased criminalisation of prostitution supports this argument.

In Australia, although the Festival of Light has picketed a gay sauna, and the Victorian police have raided a few saunas in Melbourne (claiming that they were brothels, and confiscating the free condoms), on the whole, the gay community and the AIDS councils and saunas have been able to co-operate in safe sex education and fund-raising for the AIDS councils.

It will come as no surprise to ALR readers that the level of government co-operation and support for the grassroots AIDS councils varies from state to state. Victoria leads the way, with the Cain government providing government funding for a gay-controlled Gay Community Health Centre similar to neighbourhood-based community health centres. On the other hand, the situation in Queensland leaves a lot to be desired, and the NSW Labor government, while better than its Queensland counterpart, has also gone in for homophobic publicity stunts.

In America, the situation varies from city to city. Health care activists and those interested in the political economy of health will find Altman’s account of the American health care system informative. The American government has failed to provide proper health care for people with AIDS or fund adequate research. This led to a world-wide International Mobilisation Against AIDS on 26 May to register the anger and distress of the gay community at this unforgivable failure.

The fact that AIDS can be transmitted sexually has led to much soul-searching by gay men about gay male sexuality. Questions of sexual morality, and what should be the emotional meaning of sexuality are being discussed. Altman’s book provides an overview of these discussions. One response, typified by the gay writer, Larry Kramer, is that the party is over. Gay men must stop sleeping around and should have, in the past, fought more strongly for the right to get married. Another response, voiced by Cindy Patton, calls for the need to reaffirm the vision of lesbian and gay liberation, arguing that “we were not wrong to attack the anti-sex morality of our society”.

Altman himself writes that “to simply assume that a return to conventional mores is either possible or desirable is a mistake and ignores the effects of old-style repression”.

There are several problems with these discussions, the first being that they often presume certain individualistic assumptions about sexuality. Homosexuality is not confined to the “gay community”, and the community itself is a social/political formation whose historical evolution helped to create certain individual identities in the first place.

The second danger which Altman points to is that of lapsing into metaphor. The problems of emotional fulfilment from this or that lifestyle are, in a sense, separate from those of the transmission of the virus. The danger of infection by the HTLV3 virus lies not in a particular gay lifestyle, nor in sex itself, but in particular sexual acts performed without proper protection.

Whether the gay movement will be able to communicate this to the wider society in a situation of mounting seriousness and possible panic, we have yet to see. Denis Altman’s very readable book is a contribution to this process.

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THE CHILD CARE CRISIS

Caring for Australia’s Children: Political and Industrial Issues in Child Care, by Deborah Brennan and Carol O’Donnell (Allen and Unwin, 1986). Reviewed by JUDY HILL.

Carole O’Donnell argues strongly that child care is an essential community service which is required by all families with young children. They assert that child care is a profoundly political issue. It concerns the distribution of power, resources and opportunities within families and within society at large. The amount of funds allocated to services for children, the level of service provision throughout the community and the wages and industrial conditions of child care workers are all measures of the extent
to which women and children are valued in this society.

If the availability of child care services is one criterion of the value of women and children in Australian society, Caring for Australia's Children clearly illustrates long-term political neglect. Brennan and O'Donnell note that, based on 1980 figures, just 5.8 percent of Australia's 1.1 million children under five years of age have access to a child care centre of a family day care scheme. The authors challenge the views that low levels of usage of child care services actually indicate low levels of demand, and that most parents do not want to use formal services, but would prefer to have their children minded by relatives, neighbours and friends. Research evidence to the contrary is cited, clearly proving that services are either non-existent, filled to capacity, too expensive, open at unsuitable hours, or not located on public transport routes.

The paucity of service provision is not only of concern to working mothers. Social, economic and geographic factors have caused fundamental changes in the structures of families so that parents seek access to children's services because they recognise the benefits to their own children. Attendance at a child care centre provides educational experiences, opportunities for companionship, imaginative play and loud and messy games which may not be possible in a small house or flat. Therefore the authors conclude that child care is an eagerly sought and valued family support service, especially for those parents with children who are socially isolated or disabled.

Aboriginal communities have set up child care centres to further cultural self-determination among young Aboriginal children. Migrant families see child care services as a better alternative than repatriating their children, or leaving them with minders they do not trust.

If there is such a demand for child care services, and parents regard them as a normal social provision such as educational facilities, why have Australian politicians been so reluctant to acknowledge child care as an important policy issue? Brennan and O'Donnell outline the development of Commonwealth children's services policies up to 1985. A brief historical account underlines the ideological force of the belief that child care should be only for families in need and the impact in the 1950s of Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation.

Until 1972, there was no significant Commonwealth policy for child care. The provision of these services was largely a state matter. As a result, service provision was desultory, unplanned, unrelated to population concentrations and either privately owned or of a welfare nature. With the introduction of the Child Care Act in 1972, the Commonwealth government was enabled to provide capital and recurrent grants to non-profit organisations for child care, while the parliamentary debates during the bill's passage indicate the government's reluctant acceptance of such a measure, and politicians generally mouthed traditional attitudes about women's place, the authors rightly emphasise that it was a significant development for the provision of children's services in Australia.

In December 1972, the first Labor government for twenty-three years was elected. An outline of the considerable public debate about children's services which followed clearly indicates that considerable pressure had to be maintained to ensure that Commonwealth child care policy addressed family requirements for care. Despite election promises to the contrary, the Whitlam government, in 1974, felt it necessary and possible to scale down its Children's Services Programme from $130 million to $34 million. Intense and bitter lobbying against this decision resulted in the restitution of program funding to $75 million, and an announcement that "by 1980, all children in Australia (would) have access to services designed to take care of their physical, social and recreational needs. The conclusion drawn by the authors is that this was a historic pronouncement which committed the federal government to the universal provision of children's services in Australia for the first time.

The vulnerability of children's services to ideological and political change became apparent in the lean years of the Liberal-National Party government: a government which had, by the 1982/83 financial year, reduced children's services expenditure in real terms to 22.4 percent below the 1975 figure.

Subsidised child care was stigmatised as a residual welfare service, rather than a normal social provision. The underlying philosophy of the Fraser government was that a normally functioning family would not require child care services or would be able to buy them privately.

It is not surprising, then, that the Hawke Labor government, elected in 1983, included among its policies, a commitment to child care as a right for all families, and funding levels which would allow services to be provided at a cost which could be afforded by the majority of users. It also embarked on a major expansion of services and, during the 1984 election campaign, promised to create 20,000 new child care places over a period of three years.

However, the positive direction taken by Labor, as Brennan and O'Donnell point out, has been severely undermined by massive cuts to children's services funding announced in mid-1985. The extent of these cuts is greater than in any single year of the Fraser government. Senator Peter Walsh, Finance Minister, quoted in the book, seems to sum up the Labor government's current attitude to children's services funding. Having estimated the cost of child care for every pre-school child with parents in the workforce to be $500 million for capital, and $500 million for recurrent funding, he added: "Child care should not have the priority entailed in that sort of expenditure. To expand the programme in that way would be a misallocation of funds."

Brennan and O'Donnell are naturally cautious about the long-term outcome of these cuts while, at the same time, arguing strongly against the government's reasons for implementing such draconian measures. That it is a result of political priorities, rather than good financial management, is evident from the authors' telling comparison of government policy on the dependent
undertaken by unpaid and untrained workers who depress the market so that wages and conditions of child care workers can be kept at a low level. The small industrial gains made when Child Care Act funding was tied to award wages have now been undermined by changes to the act so that staff employed in child care centres are again to be determined by outdated and inconsistent state regulations. These issues have recently caused considerable distress among parents and staff who regard training as an essential component of good quality services.

The book highlights the direct relationship between the availability of child care services and equal employment opportunities for women in paid employment. The authors point out that the care of young children is not just the responsibility of women and the establishment of an adequate network of child care services is essential if women are to assume an equal role in our society.

Government neglect and its propensity to see child care as a family (i.e., woman’s) responsibility can only be remedied by strong and concerted action from parents, unions and lobby groups.

It has been said that child care is the public policy issue around which all other factors influencing the relationship of the sexes are brought into play — on one side or the other. There are attitudes towards women which stem fundamentally from economic motives: that women are taking men’s jobs, that they accept lower pay, that they are antagonistic to trade unions, and that they weaken the general bargaining power of labour. There are also the attitudes which are essentially relational, such as the masculine desire for comfort and the smooth running of a household, the need of care for children, and the conventional conceptions of woman’s place that are part sexual, part religious and part political in origin. Child care is an issue which is a singular focus for complex attitudes and for interwoven rationalisations.

Caring for Australia’s Children examines the many aspects of the children’s services debate with some compelling insights and intelligent argument. There are many aspects which have been omitted or lightly touched upon: the impact of federal/state relations, the Australian view of welfare, the taxation system — to name a few. This limitation does not detract from this book: rather it highlights the need for further books. This one achieves its aim of drawing together the broad political and industrial dimensions of the child care debate, and it accompanies it with shrewd political insight. It is an excellent starting point for those concerned with any of these issues. Its optimistic proposals for the future development of child care policy and its confident assertion that child care is reaching political maturity, will encourage those who are working, or wish to work, in this area. In addition, an excellent set of footnoted references is available as an initial guide.

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