

WARDROBES IN WOLLONGONG

Politics In The Pub arranged a forum in the Illawarra Hotel in Wollongong entitled 'Out of the Closet - Into the Fire?' Dykes and gays turned up in force ready to discuss the issues of intimidation, violence, and the alleged Wollongong closet syndrome.

Five representatives from the Wollongong lesbian community; John Stewart (Unity); Peter Cullen (editor of the Illawarra Mercury); and Larry Galbraith (editor of the Sydney Star Observer) were the main speakers. Carole Ruthchild (Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby); Sue Thompson (Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Officer); and male representatives from Wollongong police were asked to participate also.

The discussion was ebullient from all sides represented. Larry Galbraith spoke on the changing relationship between the police and the gay and lesbian community. John Stewart explored reasons for the difficulty of coming out in a working class environment such as Wollongong. Amidst much scoffing from the crowd Peter Cullen offered a cleverly worded justification for the existence of homophobia in Wollongong, viewing Mardi Gras as bad press with its 'Queens on machines, lesbians in leather and the Sisters of Whoever.' (I've never heard Mardi Gras described in such a woman centred way before). Cullen believes that as a lesbian and gay community we feel too sorry for ourselves, we should come out of the closet, and we need to stop blaming the general public for inciting hatred against us.

Carole Ruthchild challenged this latter opinion, pointing out that homosexuals are not to blame for homophobia, violence is used by society to remind homosexuals of our place in society. Cullen invited the lesbian and gay community to write to him informing the Illawarra Mercury of any bashings occurring and he also offered to undertake a local investigation into the same.

The women representing the lesbians in Wollongong did a wonderful job of presenting their points succinctly and logically. They wanted the definition of violence broadened to include things such as violation and invisibility - not only street bashings. Street violence against dykes in Wollongong is not necessarily prevalent because there's nowhere for lesbians to socialise en masse - so to bash lesbians at a gathering would involve gatecrashing one of their dinner parties rather than being spotted and attacked on the street after visiting a dyke venue. Violence for lesbians is more often on the everyday scale of always being one of a less than accepted minority. On a wider scale violence takes forms such as children being taken from lesbian mothers, lesbians being sent to institutions, and receiving lower marks at Uni if a lesbian is out to certain lecturers.

The local dykes confirmed that homophobia is alive and flourishing. They disagreed with Cullen on numerous points, noting that it had been generous of the lesbians and gays to have sat through his abusive attitudes that night, and challenged him to use his editorial position to positively influence local opinion. They denied that Wollongong lesbians and gays sit around feeling sorry for themselves, asserting rather that 'Lesbians here are a force of change'.

Julie Price

POLICE



Police and the lesbian and gay communities are working together.

Ever been a victim of crime? Been seriously harassed or even assaulted and not called the Police because you were worried about disclosing your sexuality, being identified or not receiving professional assistance?

Police now are trying to overcome these problems and want information on all incidents involving violence, attempted violence or harassment against lesbians and gays.

These police officers are sensitive to lesbian and gay issues:-

BALMAIN	- George Wolow	(02) 556 0699
BONDI	- Evan Bouris	(02) 30 7060
KINGS CROSS	- Mick Cottier	(02) 358 9209
	- Sharon Holmes	(02) 358 9209
	- Det. Neville Sculion	(02) 358 9209
NEWTOWN	- Kerry King	(02) 550 8199
PADDINGTON	- Owen Sharwood	(02) 265 5000
SURRY HILLS	- Wendy Oste	(02) 265 4146
	- Steve Ford	(02) 265 4146

Note: If numbers are engaged ring (02) 20966 (Police switchboard)

GAY & LESBIAN CONSULTANT

The NSW Police Service has appointed a consultant to deal with problems facing the lesbian and gay communities in relation to Police matters generally. If you or your group/organisation would like to work with the Police to solve problems such as bashings or harassment or raise other issues please contact Sue Thompson at Police Headquarters on 339 5511.

GEORGIES CLOSÉS

After operating for only a month under the Royal George Hotel, Georgies has closed. Despite being one of the most attractive bars we've had and having a successful opening night Georgies failed to draw the crowds. Angela Dowling, one of the managers, said the location on the city side of Darling Harbour north was probably a bit remote for many dykes. She also said incidents of straight male harassment would have discouraged women from going.

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