

Rabbis criticise *AJN*'s coverage

A NUMBER of rabbis dealt with the issue of Jewish homosexuality and the *Australian Jewish News*' coverage of Jewish participation in the Sydney Mardi Gras in Shabbat sermons last weekend, with strong criticism being voiced from the pulpit.

Central Synagogue Rabbi Selwyn Franklin and Melbourne mining magnate Rabbi Joseph Gutnick — also speaking from the Central pulpit — castigated the *AJN* for its handling of the issue.

Rabbi Franklin said the *AJN* had overstepped the mark. Speaking to the *AJN* this week, he reiterated criticism of the newspaper he made last Friday night: "There has to be mature judgment, and I feel that it's totally out of order the way that it was covered."

On Friday evening, he emphasised that Judaism differentiates between the person and the deed, and that as everyone was created in the image of God, they should be accepted unconditionally. "But I said the issue was not the Mardi Gras any more or the question of homosexual inclination, the issue was the question of the responsibility of a Jewish newspaper."

Speaking on Shabbat at Central, Rabbi Joseph Gutnick said he had initially thought that perhaps Rabbi Franklin had over-reacted in his Friday night comments — until he saw the relevant edition of the newspaper himself.

Speaking to the *AJN*, Rabbi Franklin said Rabbi Gutnick used the word "disgusting" and said it was "highly irresponsible" of a Jewish newspaper to give the issue the coverage it had. "He said it was high time that a new Jewish newspaper was established, but didn't say he would fund it. There seemed to be a great many people who came to him afterwards agreeing with him wholeheartedly."

Rabbi Gutnick later told the *AJN* that he recognised the Mardi Gras "movement" as an issue that needed to be dealt with, but not in the manner in which the newspaper did. "The thrust of the *Jewish News*' coverage was to legitimise the Mardi Gras movement," he said.

Rabbi Gutnick also made reference from the pulpit to a paid advertisement in last week's *AJN*, which was signed by 28 prominent Jewish Australians, including three judges, eight professors and three former presidents of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and which supported the newspaper's recent coverage of gay issues.

He said he had told Central's congregants that he had been surprised to see so many promi-

nent members of the community unite to put their names to the Position Statement. "I have the greatest respect for the AOs and judges and everyone else on that ad," he told the *AJN*, "but with the greatest respect to them, they have no right to change one word of the Torah. I'm surprised that they got together on an issue like this, when the burning issues facing the community are educating our chil-



Rabbi Selwyn Franklin

dren and bringing them to synagogue, and the needs of the elderly at a time when, thank God, modern medicine is allowing people to live longer. Maybe they have done that already. I may be corrected on this, and I'd be happy to be corrected."

Former ECAJ president Dr Joachim Schneeweiss AM, one of the 28 community members who signed the "Position Statement", told the *AJN*: "Although I happened to see both Rabbi Gutnick and Rabbi Franklin later that Shabbat, neither saw fit to raise these matters with me. Had either done so, I would not have been short of a spirited reply, which might well have included some pertinent references to the proprieties of the use as well as abuse of rabbinic pulpits. However, each rabbi presumably decided that discretion in the form of silence was the better part of valour."

Maroubra Synagogue's Rabbi Haim Perez reportedly criticised both the *AJN* and The Shalom Institute for promoting homosexuality, according to a congregant who was in shule on Shabbat and who declined to be identified.

Rabbi Perez declined to tell the *AJN* what he said from the pulpit.

Kehillat Masada's Rabbi David Freedman devoted a sermon and a *shiur* to the Torah view of homosexuality, declaring it unacceptable to *Halacha*. He plans to continue the discussion in a second *shiur* this Shabbat.