

# Four questions and four answers

## VIEWPOINT

JOHN GLASS



time that censorship is justifiable is when the security of our community, of Australia, or of Israel is at stake.

By asserting its right to report on the Mardi Gras as it sees fit, and by resisting the attempt at censorship, the editor of the *Australian Jewish News* is upholding the core Jewish values of freedom, justice and lovingkindness (the latter referring to the gay and lesbian members of our community who have for so long been kept out in the cold).

The overwhelming support from such a broad cross-section of the community for the *Australian Jewish News'* reporting (as well as for the Dayenu Association) is sufficient proof that the *AJN* correctly reflects the mood of our community.

This brings us to another issue forming part of this debate. There is no evidence to suggest that the number of people in the Jewish community who prefer a homosexual lifestyle is different proportionately to that in the general community. We must therefore recognise them for the reality they represent and, as Jews, make them welcome under our communal umbrella. Their sexual preferences should have no more relevance to us than being left- or right-handed, or having been born with red hair and freckled skin.

Whilst recognising that Orthodox Jewry has a problem with homosexuality, it also has a problem with breaches of the other 612 *mitzvot*. Surely we should judge our fellow humans (if we are to judge them at all) on the totality of their commitment to Judaism and its values, not on the breach of one *mitzvah*.

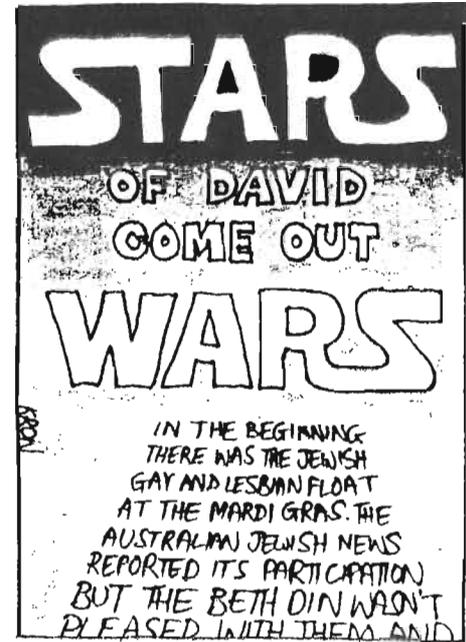
The next issue is the tangential one of the

involvement of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. It is unclear as to why its president has been requested to attend a *Din Torah*, but it seems safe to assume that it relates to the opposition by one deputy to the hypothetical question of an organisation that is supportive of homosexual individuals (as distinct from homosexuality) applying for membership of the Board. A red herring if ever there was.

Finally, there is the issue of The Shalom Institute welcoming the Dayenu Association's approach to use Shalom College on the eve of the Mardi Gras for a Shabbat service and Friday night kosher meal, including the lighting of Shabbat candles. It is inconceivable that those who claim to support Jewish values and seek their continuance should not only object to such an event, but also go to extreme lengths to stop it.

Whilst it is true that a Beth Din must respond to a request for a *Din Torah* from a member of the community, it is equally true that the substance of such a request and the history of the person making it must be seriously considered before calling on organisations and their leaders to participate in such a *Din Torah*.

The Shalom Institute jealously guards its reputation, earned over nearly 30 years, as a pluralistic organisation. It is highly regarded both within the Jewish community and the university community. It will not take part in an action based on unsubstantiated opinions held by one member of the Jewish community. The college not only houses students with a variety of religious and political views, but is also the base for a plethora of Jewish community programs such as those



provided by the Hillel Foundation, Network, Melton, AUJS and the Leadership Development Program. In helping to create a learning community, The Shalom Institute hopes that our community will grow in its tolerance and become more welcoming of diversity.

■ John Glass is president of The Shalom Institute.

THE issues surrounding the Stars of David float in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras continue to be hotly debated. There is also a degree of confusion.

There are questions regarding whether the *Australian Jewish News* should have reported the event; or should have reported it as prominently as it did; as well as whether the Sydney Beth Din should have tried to intervene and whether the *AJN* should have resisted such intervention. Clearly, the answers to these questions are yes, yes, no and yes.

We live in a free society where that very freedom is underpinned by an independent press. A newspaper must fearlessly report on the facts as it sees them, and its editorial writing must reflect honestly-held opinions. On the one hand, a newspaper reflects current events and contemporary mores through its reporting. On the other hand, one role of a Beth Din is to safeguard tradition by reference to, and interpretation of, ancient texts. Small wonder, therefore, that the two organisations find themselves at times on opposite ends of a discussion.

By intervening over the *AJN's* reporting, the Beth Din is perceived to be attempting to impose censorship. Surely in this day and age, the only