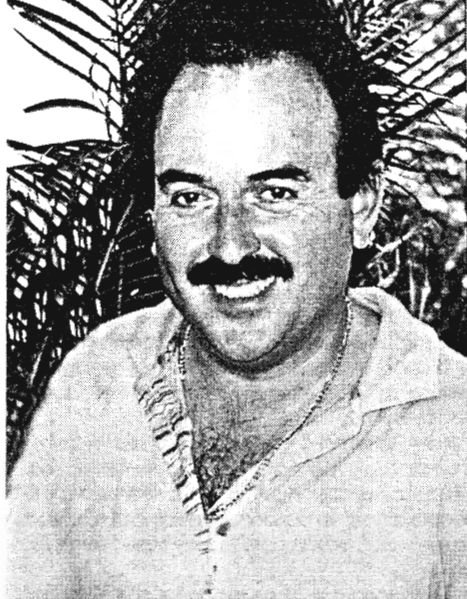




Rabbi Benzion Milecki



Malcom Davidovitz

Jewish-gay issue to screen on TV

THE Jewish-gay controversy which erupted earlier this year is the subject of ABC TV's *Compass* program on Sunday night under the title *Being Jewish But Gay*.

Rabbis Benzion Milecki, Jeff Kamins and Moshe Gutnick, gay activist Justine Armstrong, her mother, Diane Armstrong, Holocaust survivor Kitty Fischer, Dayenu president Malcom Davidovitz and *Australian Jewish News* editor Vic Alhadeff were interviewed for the program.

A communal storm arose after 160 members of the Jewish community, including visitors from abroad, participated in a Jewish float in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on March 4. The *AJN* published a photograph of two of the participants on its front page, wearing black T-shirts with a pink *Magen David*. Mr Alhadeff was subsequently requested to attend a meeting of the Sydney Beth Din and members of the NSW Rabbinical Council, some of whom had expressed displeasure at the newspaper's coverage of the Jewish participation in the Mardi Gras. He declined to attend, citing the need to maintain editorial independence, as well as the precedent that attending such a meeting would create.

An unprecedented flood of letters poured into the *AJN* — 120 in three weeks, of which 110 supported the right of Jewish people to be gay, and the duty of the *AJN* to reflect the entire community. In addition, 28 high-profile members of the community, including eight professors, three judges and three former presidents of the

Executive Council of Australian Jewry, placed an advertisement in the *AJN*, expressing similar sentiments.

South Head Synagogue Rabbi Benzion Milecki also entered the debate, emphasising that while Orthodoxy could not condone homosexuality, it was important to differentiate between people and behaviour. "As individuals, we must involve them in the community," he wrote, "while praying that they eventually develop the insight to understand the error of their actions and the strength to overcome them."

Rabbis Raymond Apple, Selwyn Franklin, Moshe Gutnick, Chaim Ingram and Haim Perez were among the Orthodox rabbis who criticised the *AJN* over its coverage of the issue.

American Rabbi Shmuley Boteach — also Orthodox — wrote that while he too could not condone homosexual behaviour, other activities are equally condemned in the Torah, yet not treated as an "abomination".

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies president Peter Wertheim and Shalom College chief executive officer Dr Hilton Immerman were also summoned to the Beth Din over gay-related issues; both also declined to attend.

The issue was reported on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as in the London *Jewish Chronicle*, *Canadian Jewish News*, *Jerusalem Post* and *Jerusalem Report*.

Compass will screen on ABC TV on Sunday, July 30 at 10:40pm.