

# FLOAT STIRS CRITICISM AMONG JEWS

JILL JONES

The first official Jewish float in this year's Mardi Gras parade has stirred up controversy, according to a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 March).

The editor of the *Australian Jewish News*, Vic Alhadeff, has been asked to respond to a submission made to the Beth Din, the Jewish high ecclesiastical body, about his reporting of the event.

In the meantime, a number of prominent Jews have signed an advertisement, appearing in the *Australian Jewish News* on Thursday 23 March, which supports the gay and lesbian Jews and their supporters who marched in the parade.

Those signatories include Professor Ron Penny, a leading AIDS expert, Justice Mahla



Pearlman, Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court, and Professor Colin Tatz, director for the Centre for Contemporary Genocide Studies at Macquarie University.

Professor Penny told *Sydney*

*Star Observer*, "I've been a strong supporter of the gay community during the AIDS epidemic and in this situation, because I am a Jew, I want to fight for freedom and non-discrimination in the Jewish community. Jews and gays were lumped together as part of the Nazi persecution. Although of course Jews got a far larger dose of mass murder, homosexuals were not spared either."

Organisers and participants in the float have expressed outrage and concern. Dawn Cohen told *Sydney Star Observer*, "It is outrageous for any group of people to think they have a right to repress freedom of speech."

Cohen welcomed the advertisement in the *Jewish News*. "I have no idea who organised this," she said. "What is absolutely extraordi-

nary and wonderful is that Australian Jews are saying we stand by the Jewish tradition of fighting for social justice."

Justine Armstrong, who also participated in the float, said of the *Herald* report, "Initially I was quite concerned. The orthodox part of the community has a lot of control. It's very exciting that now an issue that has been swept under the carpet is now really out there."

Armstrong's mother, well-known author Diane Armstrong, whose book *Mosaic* has just been short-listed for the National Biography award, also marched. She has since written an article for *Jewish News*.

"I'm proud of my mother who decided to march. Her article has meant she's unwittingly become a role model for Jewish parents of gay and lesbian kids."