

Fred "Vile"

and his bumbling bigots

In the last week of September 1990, "Fuckwit Fred" announced that he and his mindless followers would march through Kings Cross and clean out the prostitutes with the "Cleansing Blood of Jesus"... oh please.

In a week RAMS organised a welcoming reception for Fred and his brain dead disciples, to defend civil liberties, human rights and freedom of choice, sexuality and employment. What happened that day was a milestone in our struggle for sexworker rights, and a landmark in the annals of sex industry and gay political history.

This is what happened - RAMS called a meeting with Kings Cross Police (Chief Inspector Jim McClosky and Senior Sergeant Bruce Couch), and Sue Thompson, the Gay and Lesbian Police Liaison Officer.

Notice was given to the police by us of our intention to demonstrate. Arrangements were made and agreed to for a peaceful demonstration and for the safety of everyone there.

These arrangements included an agreement from the police that the crowd would not be divided into Fred's followers and demonstrators, and that the police would not erect barricades.

A crowd of about 2000 people including sexworkers, gays, lesbians and supporters turned out that holiday Monday in October to "welcome" "Fascist Fred" at Fitzroy Gardens (the fountain) Kings Cross. An hour before Fred even arrived, the Police panicked at the size of the peaceful crowd of anti Fred demonstrators, and attacked those gathered with horses, drew up an imaginary line on the ground that was not to be crossed, set up a hostile and aggressive human barricade of police and proceeded to make violent, provocative and unnecessary arrests.

Twenty two people were arrested, some beaten viciously by police while in custody. Others were injured during the struggles. Charges laid included Offensive Language, Hindering Police, Resisting Arrest and Assaulting a Police Officer. Most charges were laughed out of court, including that of an outreach worker who was charged with Discharging an Offensive Missile to the Danger of the Public... when she tossed a condom into the air.

Following the demonstration and arrests, a series of crisis meetings were called by RAMS to provide support to those arrested and to discuss with the community what action should be taken about the police's actions on the day and their treatment and bashing of gays, lesbians and sexworkers.

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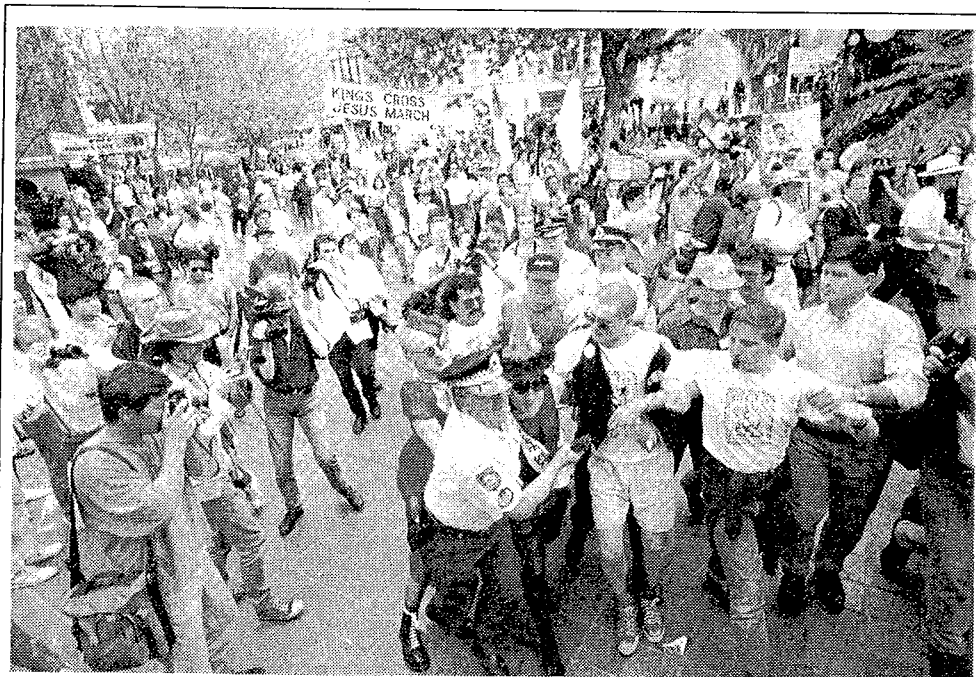
It was almost a year to the day. In October '89 the Reverend Fred Nile led about 1500 Christians up Oxford Street into the heart of gay Sydney in what he described as a "cleansing march".

Approximately 5000 lesbians and gay men crowded the streets to express their disapproval and opposition to Fred and all that he stands for. The event achieved little for Fred and his fundamentalist supporters apart from create a storm of media interest. For the gay community however, it created the opportunity for gay men and gay women to join together as one group with a common aim. The Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby produced a poster following the march which read: "Thanks Fred for helping to bring lesbians and gay men together. Together against bigotry and intolerance."

This year Fred steered clear of Oxford Street and decided instead to try and cleanse Kings Cross of it's prostitutes, sex

clubs and drug users. Opposition to Fred was again heated. This time however, not only were gay people attracted to protest the rally but other minority groups joined in as well.

"Basically what we had there on the day were people from special interest groups and minorities who'd got together to say no to bigotry and hatred," said Robin Svendsjaryd of RAMS who organised the counter rally. "I'm thrilled with the response we had. I think that Fred needs to be opposed where ever he goes - I'd go out into the desert if that's where he was. It's not just the gays he's attacking now. He's coming down here to



tell us we're all filth and dirt and that well burn in hell, and trying to deny us our right to work. It's an attack on our civil liberties. And when one group is victimised, everyone is in danger.

Despite the generally festive air on the day, the counter protest was marred by the arrest of 22 anti - Fred demonstrators - even before Fred had arrived. The arrests were made by both uniformed and plain clothed policemen (one of whom was later seen distributing leaflets for the Christians) and for the most part seemed unprovoked. Arrestees were charged with a variety of offences under the Summary Offences Act including offensive behaviour/language, resisting arrest and obstructing police. As the day wore on stories of police brutality in the lock-up cells were reported. The Gay Solidarity Group and People Living With AIDS have both called for an inquiry. Police Gay Liaison Officer, Sue Thompson, believes that the amount of arrests can be attributed to the fact that Kings Cross Police were unprepared for the number of counter demonstrators and, unlike the Surry Hills Police, are not familiar with the kind of crowd control required at a rally of that nature.

Scheduled to appear at the rally was ex-sex worker, now anti porn activist, Linda Lovelace. She failed to show. A source close to Campaign revealed that just days before the rally Fred appealed to Continental Airlines for a free air ticket for Ms Lovelace, which they refused, suggesting that Linda was not even in the country.

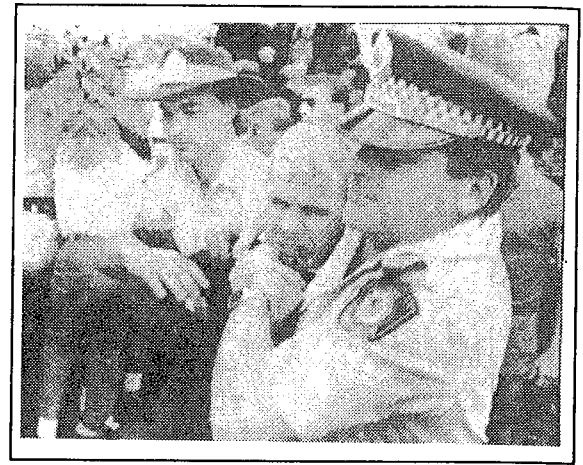
For many the highlight of the protest was provided by the entertaining antics of a drag queen called Shuvon. While fundamentalists moralised from the safety of the stage Shuvon, carried on the shoulders of the crowd, sang and danced and, in true drag style, mimed to many of the gospel songs broadcast over the public address system. Her biggest crowd pleaser was undoubtedly the Hallelujah Chorus at the end of which, she stripped. Later she led a samba through the crowd and encouraged the protesters to sing and dance along to the Christians pre - recorded music.

Again the Reverend Nile has proved the futility of his "crusades" and reaffirmed the strength of the community which opposes his, and his followers, campaign of bigotry and hate.

If there's one thing the Reverend Nile does achieve with his "cleansing marches" and "crusades" it's publicity. And Lots of it. Let's face it, there's nothing the mainstream media like more than a rowdy clash between radical extremists like the Fundamentalists and an oppressed, though vocal, social minority like us: the gay community.

Fred always looks funny on television and it's a good chance for the cameras to get some shots of men in frocks and some "radical" looking women with short hair cuts. But all too often in the past the mainstream press have treated the Nile's v Gays clashes as little more than "good copy". If they take sides they generally take Fred's. Though rarely do they report accurately on Fred's motives or on the gay community's response.

A prime example of this can be seen in the Daily Telegraph report of the Nile rally. Clarissa Bye's article is headlined: "Nile Rally Violence - 20 Held After Gay Protest". The accompanying photograph shows a passive looking policeman being yelled at by protesters. The headline and the



photograph together imply that it was the gay protesters that were causing the violence when in fact the only violence which occurred was perpetrated by the police against the protesters. The opening sentence of the article reports that, "gay protesters clashed violently with supporters of the Reverend Fred Nile's Southern Cross Crusade yesterday." Untrue. There was no violence between the Christians and the gay (or otherwise) protesters. The violence came from the police. Later in her story Bye makes the outrageous, and clearly prejudicial, claim that "...the protesters openly passed around tabs of LSD..." and described anti - Nile demonstrators as "oddly dressed characters".

The Sydney Morning Herald, on the other hand, found the whole event terribly amusing, and carried the headline, "Why have you forsaken me, Linda?" with a photograph of three police dragging a protester away by the throat. Elizabeth Jurman referred to the rally as a "jihad" and described how a "Jesus impersonator led the march...dragging a collapsible crucifix on wheels.

The two disciples / minders of "Jesus" refused any interviews on his behalf..." Thankfully Jurman reported that not all Christians were there to support Fred:

Adam Bartley, a deacon of the Metropolitan Community Church, said he was there to protect people's rights to do as they pleased. "There are laws that deal with prostitution and sexuality," he said. "This guy's here with a limited agenda." The most accurate report on the days events appeared in the Eastern Express. The headline "rally Turns Ugly" is complimented with photographs of Fred Nile cowering behind a body guard while another picture shows the brutality of the police arrests. The story by David Harbour, describes how one protester was dragged away by the throat after she objected to being pushed backwards by the police. It also quotes a witness who describes the abuse in the lock - up at Kings Cross police station. The Eastern Express also spoke to the Rev Dr Clyde Dominish of the Wayside Chapel who deplored Nile's presence in Kings Cross and accused him of "bringing out anger and violence and doing nothing to further Christianity."

The Reverend Fred Nile is a creature made, and fed, by media attention. Do we, in attacking Fred's rallies, only add fuel to his flame? Would he be given as much time in the media without the colourful presence of the gay community and others who oppose him? On the other hand can we afford to ignore him or anyone who threatens our lifestyles and our freedom of choice?