

Queers fighting back

Thursday 27 July 2006, by [EVANS Rachel](#), [HUGHES Mel](#) (Date first published: 26 July 2006).

Eighty countries still criminalise homosexuality. Beheading, torture, jai or rape await many queers fighting for their rights across the world.

In one of the worst reported cases, Iran beheaded two young gay men in July 2005. Last month, the US-backed Iraqi security forces executed a young gay man. Defying threats of violence, Russian queers took to the streets a month ago to mark the 13th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality and to highlight ongoing state-sanctioned human rights abuses.

The AIDS virus has killed around 26 million people, half of them women, in the last 23 years. Half of the 126 countries reporting to UNAIDS have policies that interfere with prevention, such as criminalising homosexuality. At the June UN general assembly meeting, which discussed the AIDS pandemic, conservative delegates insisted on expunging the words “sex workers” and “homosexuals” from the declarations.

The Australian government has set a homophobic agenda. PM John Howard was the first leader worldwide to introduce a ban on same-sex marriage. He has described queers as physiologically disturbed and unfit to raise children, echoing the racist paternalism of those bigots who opposed blacks and whites marrying.

Queers are in the neo-conservatives’ sights. But this year we have campaigned for queer spaces to organise the fight-back. We have supported refugee protests and anti-war marches, and marched against the anti-union laws. We’ve defended our student unions and fought for their activist, grassroots integrity.

Wollongong queers organised successfully against local Christian fundamentalists who were offering a \$200 “cure” for homosexuality. Perth activists led and won a queer space at Edith Cowan University.

Melbourne queers were the backbone of the campaign against “voluntary student unionism” (VSU) and the privatisation of public spaces on campus, and Melbourne University queers fought a policy of “no political posters or banners” in their union building. Canberra students have fought and won the right to organise in a queer space and have been the activist backbone of the struggle against the ban on civil unions in the ACT.

Queers have campaigned against poverty and we took action to fight Work Choices and VSU on June 1 in a youth and student strike. At the recent education conference in Melbourne, queers won support for a national day of action in second semester against VSU.

When Hillsong and the Christian right are getting 20,000 to weekend mobilisations in Adelaide, we have to get better organised to fight back. In this climate of fear-mongering, we all need to be the Rosa Parkes, Malcolm Xs, Peter Tatchells and Angela Davis’s of today.

If we dare to struggle, we will win a world based on love, health, education and dignity for all.

Queer students organise

Mel Hughes, Sydney

This year's Queer Collaborations (QC) conference, held at the University of New South Wales on July 3-7, was attended by 250 people, most of them university students.

The conference - Australia's largest national forum for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and other queer activists - was themed "Rainbow Terror Alert", a spoof on the US colour-coded terrorism alert system, aimed against PM John Howard's inclusion of same-sex couples in "anti-terror" laws while denying them civil unions and same-sex marriage.

The conference addressed the rise of "fear politics" through a plenary featuring queer Refugee Action Coalition member Norrie May Welby; sedition law, queer and civil rights expert Kate Davison; and Peter Politics, an expert on government outsourcing of services from the queer and community sectors to religious organisations.

Other speakers included Anna Samson from Sydney Stop the War Coalition, and Farida Iqbal from Sydney's Community Action against Homophobia.

Fred Fuentes, national coordinator of the socialist youth organisation Resistance, addressed the conference on the need for "cross-movement solidarity".

The conference concluded with a rally at the Crown Hotel in Surry Hills, condemning it for its homophobia and discrimination against people with disabilities.

P.S.

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* Abridged from an opening address to the Queer Collaborations conference in Sydney on July 3-7. Rachel Evans is the National Union of Students female queer officer and a member of the Socialist Alliance.