

On 27 September, 1983, a public meeting attended by approximately 150 people considered the issue of police harassment of minorities. Organised by the Council for Civil Liberties (NSW), it brought together the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Collective of Australian Prostitutes, the Gay Rights lobby, the NSW Motorcycle Riders Association, Women Against Rape, Australian Collective of Transexuals and National Organisation for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (N.O.R.M.L.). The meeting was chaired by Wendy Bacon who referred briefly to the historical origins of the NSW CCL some twenty years ago in response to allegations of abuse of police power. She welcomed the change of emphasis from the examination of particular incidents to an attempt to analyse harassment of groups. Reference was also made to the difficulty in distinguishing the exercise of police power from its abuse given the extremely wide discretions available and the lack of accountability. Reproduced below is a summary of the statements made at the meeting by the various groups and the resolutions adopted.

Transexuals and Police Persecution Roberta Perkins

Transexuals are people born of either biological sex, but who develop close identification with members of the gender opposite that assigned them at birth. To take M-F transsexualism, from a very young age a biologic male with this tendency will perceive himself as a girl and attempt to express himself this way until in time he comes to believe that he is inherently female. No amount of pressure from parents and teachers or ostracism by other children will convince him otherwise.

When he finally breaks away from the restrictive and punitive atmosphere of home and school life and discovers others like himself in the transsexual subculture he then finds relief from his oppressive and agonizing male role by adopting the dress and lifestyle of the gender with which he has always closely identified. But he also experiences difficulties in finding housing and employment, suffers public ridicule and hostility and sees the police taking over the role of punitor from parents and teachers.

The transsexual subculture offers a haven to young transsexuals, but it also concentrates them for public attention. Because the only jobs many of them can obtain are as drag artistes, strippers or prostitutes, these perpetuate the popular notion of transsexuals as freaks and deviants, categories which bring immediate suspicion from police. Unfortunately, police today still adhere to the Victorian interpretation of 'drag queen' as a pervert dressing as a woman to corrupt unsuspecting males, or molest innocent females and little children. But, as the police are men, or at least those who come into contact with transsexuals are, it goes deeper than this, for transsexuals disturb hidden fears in males about their own masculinity like 'if she used to be a man, how close am I to being a woman?' So, whenever a policeman bashes a transsexual he does so in an attempt to resubmerge these fears. Yet, cops have been known to demand a blow job from transsexuals, and here is a further dilemma, it raises another fear, homophobia; because the cop was attracted to the feminine appearance of a pretty trans-

sexual, but has been told by his superiors that she is only a man in disguise, he bashes her again for making him feel like a poof.

Attacks by police on transsexuals are legendary in the subculture, and are one of the hazards of being transsexual. In the early 60s, rounding up drag performers was a favourite sport of the Vice Squad, and the girls had to commute to work hidden on the floor of taxis so the scanning eye of the detective on duty at the entry into Darlinghurst Road would not notice them. One showgirl was picked up by cops and taken to a room for a gang bang; her anus afterwards received multiple stitches, not to mention the effect the episode had on her mentally. A famous stripper of the late 70s was picked up and given a choice of charges; when she refused to comply by choosing her own committal, the arresting officers called her a freak, broke her nose and ribs and let her go. She reported the incident to a doctor treating her damages, but he replied he did not want to get involved. The police hounded her unceasingly after that until she was forced to contact Civil Liberties and take out a restraining order on her persecutors.

More recently, it was the transsexual prostitutes working the streets of Darlinghurst who were a favourite target for police harassment. Up until mid-last year they were pouring through the courts under a homosexual charge; but since a court case in which two transsexuals pleaded not guilty and challenged the law to define them, that form of persecution has ended. Last December, the Vice Squad announced its intentions to swoop down on prostitutes in Darlinghurst following mounting pressure from resident action groups. When the blitz came and 40 policemen charged into the area, they proclaimed they made 70 arrests, and the newspapers proudly reported "Cops Win Battle of Darlo". Nothing like it since the Falklands, and like that event 'our boys' were con-

gratulated for doing 'their duty'. The truth of the matter is that the 'enemy' was overwhelmingly outnumbered. Those 70 arrests by those 40 policemen were made of just 20 transsexuals who worked from Darley Street. One girl ended up with six warrants and is at the moment in Long Bay with male prisoners. The charge used on the transsexuals was the notorious offence of 'Causing Serious Alarm or Affront'. Not only were multiple arrests made, but all of the girls were told to get out of Darley Street for good, even though they were not contravening any law. These events occurred some four months before legislation introduced the now infamous amendment making soliciting from a residential street illegal. The transsexuals believe they were driven out simply because they disturbed the sensibilities of not only the narrow bigots among residents but also the police.

Having moved to William Street to work, the transsexuals are still the main focus for arrest as a visit to the magistrates' courts on any day will confirm. One girl has told me she gets arrested simply walking to work, even before she starts soliciting.

At present transsexuals are the most legally denied of all identifiable groups. We can't marry, travel overseas, or take out life assurance in our reassigned sex because birth certificate records cannot be altered regardless of a person's history. The anti-discrimination laws do not recognise us. Very shortly, we transsexuals are expecting the Federal and State Governments to begin making the sweeping legislative changes that will give us legal recognition. Right now it is an optimistic time for us, and we would like to share this optimism with the Police Department. With these legislative changes our present position of legal non-existence will be gone forever. Let's hope the Department's Victorian view of 'drag queen' will go with it.