



## **Community Memorial for Irene Doutney**

**Friday 29 June 2018 – Redfern Town Hall**



# Program

## 2.15pm Welcome

- MC Sylvie Ellsmore

## Acknowledgement of Country

- Aunty Millie Ingram

## Tribute by Lord Mayor of Sydney Clover Moore

## Reflections from family and friends

- Jane and David Doutney
- Hans Bos

## Defending Public Housing and Redfern Waterloo

- MC Sylvia Hale
- Mike Shreenan, Counterpoint Community Services (The Factory) and REDWatch
- Charmaine Jones, Inner Sydney Voice

## Activism and the Greens

- MC Darelle Duncan
- Rachel Evans
- Jenny Leong MP and Mehreen Faruqi MP

## 3.30pm Break and Refreshments

## Contributions from the floor and musical tributes

- MC Gillian Pick
- Al Turnbull
- Hans Bos and the Red Frogs

## 4.45pm Close and thank you

After 5pm, guests are invited to gather at Redfern Club next to Redfern Station.

Thank you to the City of Sydney, The Greens NSW, Office of Jenny Leong MP and Irene's friends and family for making this event possible.



*“With Irene’s passing in June 2018, the Greens and the Redfern Waterloo community have lost one of their finest advocates for justice.”*

# Obituary

By Catherine Turner with contributions from Darelle Duncan, Sylvie Ellsmore and Ray Goodlass.

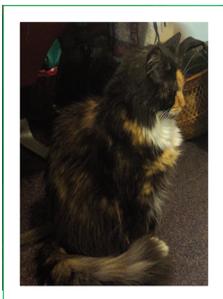
For activists across Sydney, Irene Doutney was a familiar face. Though she had been elected to sit inside Sydney Town Hall as a Councillor, she was more often on the outside, demanding justice for the marginalised.

She never missed an opportunity to stand and fight for the community but few people knew that Irene had been forced to fight her whole life. As a survivor of childhood poverty, depression, sexual abuse, domestic violence and heroin addiction, this public housing resident was a fierce voice for the voiceless.

As a Councillor of the City of Sydney Irene stood alongside inner city housing residents as the NSW Government tried to force them to the outskirts of the city. She understood better than anyone that the vitality of Sydney depends on inclusion. Irene was determined not to see marginalised people erased from Sydney's story. She was also passionate about extending these rights to the animal residents of the city and working with animal rights and environmental activists to ensure urban biodiversity was protected.

Although she was elected twice to sit on the City of Sydney Council, Irene wasn't a politician, she was a community activist to the core. She was generous with her time and genuine in all her interactions with residents and activists. Though not everyone knew her story, many were touched by the depths of her compassion and empathy.

Irene was born in Sydney in 1948, and spent her early years in her family's rent controlled flat in Kings Cross, before the family moved to Banksia. She attended her first rally, for nuclear disarmament, at the age of 14. Irene completed a Diploma of Fine Art at St George Technical College after leaving school.



Irene spent the '70s working in the arts, fashion and theatre, in-between battles with depression that began in her childhood. One night in 1978 she joined her friends in a protest that would be later known as the first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. By the early '90s Irene had freed herself of heroin.

Irene moved into public housing in Redfern in 1996. Being in stable accommodation had a huge impact on her life, and by the early 2000s she had begun to find her voice as a community activist in The Factory Community Centre and, later, resident group REDwatch and the Greens.

In 2008 Irene was successfully elected to City of Sydney Council, and re-elected in 2012, serving as Deputy Mayor in 2016. Her first notice of motion called for the expansion of affordable housing in the city. Her achievements on Council included establishing the City of Sydney as a Fair Trade Town, creating the first ecology officer on Council, introducing a new drop off e-waste system and the delivery of a \$7 million upgrade to the Joanna O’Dea public housing complex in Forest Lodge. She was Co-Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel and travelled to Japan to represent Council at a UN Convention for biodiversity.

Irene always stood with those experiencing injustice and discrimination and used her platform as an advocate for others. Despite being diagnosed with terminal cancer in late 2014 Irene continued to fight for others in her role as Councillor and in 2016 as Deputy Lord Mayor.

With Irene’s passing in June 2018, the Greens and the Redfern Waterloo community have lost one of their finest advocates for justice. Irene’s values weren’t a political platform, they were part of who she was. She was a wonderful teacher, mentor, feminist, wise counsel and very dear friend.



*The following are some of Irene’s speeches during her time on City of Sydney Council.*

# Irene's speech for Human Rights Day – for Same Sex Marriage

Newtown – 10 November 2008

*We are gathered here in front of the Martin Luther King “I have a dream” memorial on Human Rights Day and I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Aboriginal land and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.*

*What an appropriate place to be on Human Rights Day and I'm back at the place where I made my first public speech earlier this year – it's good to be back and speaking out again for CAAH (Community Action Against Homophobia).*



*Recently the Australian Government made a large number of changes to Federal law giving gay and lesbian couples more rights than they've ever had before but they refused to take the final step and recognise same sex marriage.*

*By doing this they continued down the path that has kept queers excluded from the central institutions of our society for so long. As long as marriage is regarded as the culmination of our relationships it must be open to all couples regardless of their sexual orientation.*

*For the majority of people marriage is the ultimate demonstration of their love for their chosen partner and it is society's recognition of that love and commitment.*

*Without that recognition our relationships and our feelings are diminished and demeaned in the eyes of the rest of society. We remain outsiders whose relationships are not good enough to be officially recognised.*

*Human rights are not divisible – some for one group and less for another – how can you just take away or deny some rights from some people like our Aboriginal brothers and sisters while other groups get everything.*

*Our society has two great prejudices ... racism and homophobia, and the denial of the right to marry for gay and lesbian couples just reinforces this homophobic prejudice.*

*In California last May, same sex marriage was legalised and 18,000 gay and lesbian couples got married. At the November presidential election however this law was overturned by referendum after the most expensive non-presidential campaign ever.*

*This Proposition 8 took away rights given by law and was done after a huge campaign initiated by right wing religious conservatives who demanded a strict Biblical interpretation of marriage.*

*It is ironic that the driving force behind this attack on queer couples was the Church of the Latter Day Saints, or as they are better known the Mormons, a group who have historically been committed to polygamy and the repression of women.*

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*Proposition 8 defined the institution of marriage as the union between a man and a woman and it is based on a strict interpretation of Bible scriptures. It is a religious interpretation of marriage and reinforces traditional views on marriage that go back to the middle ages.*

*It is gender biased and no longer reflects the changing and more diverse nature of our 21st century society. In the US, Proposition 8 was historically used to stop interracial marriages and shows the dual prejudice that links racism and homophobia.*

*The same laws are used to discriminate against minority groups and deny them the rights taken for granted by the rest of society.*

*In Australia our leaders have constantly harped on the idea that marriage is purely for straight society. We all remember Kevin Rudd and Brendan Nelson droning on about the union between a man and a woman being the only true definition of marriage.*

*Well we all know that marriage is about loving partners and can just as easily be the union between a woman and a woman or a man and a man or a trans and any of the above. It is a union based on love not on gender.*

*How hypocritical is this government and Ministers like Penny Wong, a sister who won't even stand up for true gay equality. But then this whole Labor Government is a disappointment on so many human rights front from their continuation of the Intervention to their treatment of refugees.*

*They just don't get it. They can't take us this far towards full rights and then leave us hanging with no official recognition. We've come too far and got*



*too close to equality to be left behind now.*

*And we must never allow the Californian experience of going backwards to happen here.*

*The proposers of Proposition 8 tried to scare American society with claims that recognising gay relationships would*

*undermine the fabric of society, religion and heterosexual marriage and they spent millions of dollars to get that message across.*

*They threatened to name and shame companies that had donated to the No to Proposal 8 campaign and generally fired up all the homophobic ideas that have made life hell for gays for hundreds of years. This despicable campaign must never be allowed to happen here and it's a warning how quickly things can change.*

*That's why it's important for us to get same-sex marriage recognised and enshrined in the law.*

*Only when we are equal before the law in all things will we be truly equal in society.*

*Greens politicians like Bob Brown in Canberra and Lee Rhiannon here in NSW have been fighting for full recognition for same sex relationships since we got into parliament and we will keep up the struggle until we win.*

*Equal rights for all. End discrimination now.*

## Millers Point evictions

7 April 2014

*When I stood for Council my main aim was to give a voice to those people who had difficulties getting their voices heard. As a public housing tenant it has been my challenge on Council to help HNSW tenants in every way I can as they cope with a heartless and dysfunctional bureaucracy.*

*Since my first year on Council I have been working with the tenants down in Millers Point individual by individual, to help them get maintenance done and with disputes with the department.*



*I have seen most of the houses down in Millers Point and I would stress that residents have made the best of their houses beautifying their living areas and taking great pride in their homes.*

*I have always been flabbergasted that Housing NSW did not do the most obvious maintenance to all of these properties which would have solved many of*

*the problems now being faced by residents and that was to fix the guttering thus stopping mould, peeling walls, rotting floors and damp ceilings.*

*Millers Point is one of the strongest public housing communities in the State with deep roots going back to the early 20th Century when the Maritime Services Board provided workers housing for the seamen and wharf workers, the people who made Sydney the successful working harbour that it has become.*

*What we see today is an attempt by the State Government and the Department of FACS in particular to destroy this community and relocate voluntarily or forcibly residents from homes they have known all their lives.*

*I note that the Minister on the day that she announced the sell-off of Millers Point had 40 officers on the ground knocking on doors and handing*

residents eviction notices. At the same time the Minister distributed very misleading and biased media packs which identified particularly run down houses for media inspection contrasted with done up 99 year leaseholder's properties to show what it should be like. The media pack also broke confidentiality by giving easily recognisable examples of people who were happy to have moved.

However as we all know ask the right questions and you will be able to get the responses you want.

The Minister made a lot of "notional and abstract" subsidies that made it look like the Millers Point tenants were receiving benefits that they do not receive. The LAHC is now the landlord and they know very well that tenants pay rent on properties already owned by the government and are not and should not be subject to market forces.

Already the anxiety, panic and distress that these residents are feeling has led to a number of elderly residents having stress attacks with one elderly

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resident having a heart attack. Many will know Ron the NAB rep for the Sirius building, a man in his 80s who has also been bed ridden over the past week with stress and anxiety related illness. Ron was one of the strong voices speaking out against the sell-off.

The cold hearted economics of this decision goes against everything that a just and equitable government should aspire to and we all know that the Minister has not made any real commitment to replacing this important housing but has instead said that all funds will go to "public housing priorities" which could mean anything from wages to maintenance but no firm commitment to new dedicated housing.

I note that in 2012/2013 the Government sold off 1300 properties and built 1563 less houses than in the previous year. They have cut \$42m from the public housing maintenance budget and \$22m from the budget for new housing stock.

Then we have the Sirius building which was built as a result of the Green Bans to save the Rocks and it is a purpose built building for seniors to age in place, it is in good condition and without many of the problems facing

*other buildings and yet this building is regarded as too good for its ageing tenants who will be dramatically affected by its sell off.*

*Public housing tenants are sadly stigmatised and resented by many people who think that just because they're poor they have no right to live in the inner city where property prices are out of control. But we must remember that these housing estates were developed when these areas were not popular and were even then a way of putting the disadvantaged in the least desirable areas.*

*Public housing tenants are human beings and should be treated with respect not moved around like cattle. What is happening in Millers Point*



*is the tip of the iceberg and as we know in Redfern and Waterloo more government sell-offs are in the air. In the blurb given out by the Minister the rents and subsidies were compared to other areas like the Central Coast, Campbelltown, Minto, Mount Druitt and other outer suburbs which cannot be compared to the inner city and it shouldn't be implied that inner city tenants should be eventually moved to the outskirts of the city.*

*If Millers Point goes ahead who will be next as the inner city estates are all now in high market price areas – Surry Hills, Erskineville, Glebe, Redfern but of course these were not shown in the FACS handout.*

*If we allow the sell-off of this heritage area and close community we will be approving the great divide that is building up between the low-income poor and disadvantaged who live in our city. I call on Councillors to support all our constituents and not just the rich and elite.*

## Irene's final speech to Council, 2016



*As I prepare to leave this role I look back on 8 years in office with a sense of pride and of regret.*

*Pride at what this City has achieved and what it stands for.*

*For its leadership in crucial areas of sustainability and the challenge this places at the feet of other governments. Pride for the way in which we have responded to the task of preparing diverse and resilient*

*communities for a carbon constrained future. Pride to have been connected to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Panel since it started. Pride to have been the co-chair of the Environment Committee.*

*The regret I feel is one that many activists feel. Regret that important social environmental and economic change can only move so fast. It had seemed during the last 8 years that while the City has worked hard at strengthening our communities, federal and state governments have pulled the rug out from under us – selling out our public housing communities, cutting services, slashing the arts, retreating from the promise of renewable energies and handing iconic and precious public land over to the private sector to build a casino that will be a blight on our landscape and world famous harbour.*

*I also deeply regret the loss of Robyn Kemmis; a pillar of this Council for many years.*

*Sydney has always been my home. I was born in the Cross and have been a long time resident of Redfern. I've seen significant change over my lifetime. I've also seen the enduring resilience of disadvantaged communities across Sydney and the important community work that has allowed them to thrive. My fellow public housing tenants are an important part of the city's fabric. These people deserve a place in the city's future. Yet more and more, they are being shut out.*

*The strength of communities across Sydney is their understanding that our wellbeing and our destinies are inexorably linked. As the political leaders of*

*this city it is our responsibility to ensure that we all move forward together. When we move disadvantaged people out to the suburbs, out of sight, we are all poorer.*

*My great hope for Sydney is that it continues to embrace and celebrate its diversity. This is an act that requires more than just platitudes and parades. It is an act that requires strong leadership and deliberate planning. We must work to strengthen our community organisations and foster understanding across our great city. Our future leaders must understand that the market does not deliver opportunities to those who, for a myriad of reasons, are struggling for inclusion.*

*Equally, it is important our elected representatives reflect this diversity. While we haven't always agreed on everything I have really enjoyed the opportunity to work with my fellow Councillors, and appreciate those of you who have reached out a hand of support and friendship when most needed.*

*What makes the City of Sydney successful is its engagement with our communities. I want to place on the record my thanks to all those in the community that took time to contact me and keep me up to date on their neighbourhood. The job of a Councillor is a difficult one and we would not be able to do the job effectively without the generous work of many community members.*

*In 2008 I was as surprised as anyone to find myself elected to the City of Sydney. I never saw myself as a politician. I am humbled to have been selected to represent my community and to play a small role in Sydney's*

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*long and rich history. As a community activist, it has meant so much to me to have this platform to advocate for others. I'm so proud to be associated with the City of Sydney and I send my love and best wishes to those of you that will be continuing the task of guiding the City through the next 4 years. Most importantly I send my heartfelt thanks to all of you across the organisation and the community that have supported me in my role as Councillor. I have so much respect for you all and the work you do. You all have a special place in my heart. Especially my team Catherine, Gillian and previously Robert, who have made my work that much easier.*



*“The strength of communities across Sydney is their understanding that our wellbeing and our destinies are inexorably linked. As the political leaders of this city it is our responsibility to ensure that we all move forward together.”*

From Irene's final speech to City of Sydney Council, 2016.