

SANDON POINT'S LAST SUMMER

By ARIANE LEWIS

The sky is breaking with the day over a not too distant horizon. Some shuffle out from their tents, their clothes and skin scented by the smoke from last night's fire. They've been here for a few months now, some come and go, some stay all the time.

Ted "Uncle Guboo" Thomas sits facing the rising sun. He watches with eyes almost as old as the land itself the horizon as it chases the blue away, turning into crimson red and deep purple. The sky lets light change it, reflect it and define it and calling to the Great Spirit, Uncle Guboo sings the Dreamtime.

It's the last week of February, and Sandon Point has been written a thousand times across the press, and through the sand shores on McCauley's beach. It is a time where politics overshadowed honourable respect to Australia's indigenous people, and faith in local politics was replaced with disaffection. History was in the making on our local shores and if there was ever a time where capitalist development overshadowed environmental sensibility it is happening now.

Down on McCauley's, at the Sandon Point Kuradji Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) the beach tends to welcome you with gentle kindness. At night the waves caress an anxious mind to sleep, and during the day the sun throws sparks of light across the very tip of the horizon. There's a community happening here: a community built on common respect and acknowledgment of issues.

Sandon Point has ripped up ordinary politics for the last couple of months, testing the notions of democracy and accountability Wollongong City Council once prided itself on. It has enlightened people on the role a property giant like Stocklands Trust Group can

play in local politics. A role it seems that challenges democratic representation in local government and all too easily abducts our confidence in the Lord Mayor, and the ALP.

On February 19 Wollongong City Council passed Stage One of the Sandon Point development. Stages Two to Six will go to court later in the year, as Stocklands takes on Wollongong City Council in the Land and Environment Court, otherwise affectionately known as a "developers court". The happenings of that evening on February 19 saw an unrestful community agitate the council enough to have them understand just how angry they were. They yelled, they called "shame", they called for the ALP to get out, they called for "democracy". Resounding through the room the voices became politics, and the politics became opposition. And from then on, the night drove dishonesty home to someone's conscience.

The following day the Lord Mayor was found guilty of among other things being content to lie under oath, and taking advantage of a former business partner "by unconscionable conduct". Such a finding did not entirely go down unno-

ticed and within one day there were calls for his resignation. The upshot of it is Wollongong is being governed by a Lord Mayor who has a serious misguided commitment to his citizens. This misguided commitment is reflected in community consultations on almost every issue in Wollongong, highlighted of course, by the Sandon Point epic. The people are not happy, the community is not entirely at ease. Their assets are being overshadowed by political gains and personal aims. Such personal aims are now starting to characterise the local ALP dominated council as it takes profit before people, and corporate greed before community need.

Corporate greed overtaking community need is a mantra you will find at protests challenging economic globalisation. As this world increasingly defines itself on competition and capitalist profit it forgets the human and earthly spirit which acts as its function and its reason.

The interplay of the two on a local level have startling consequences. The issue of environment v. development has taken interesting turns recently. In December, Lord Mayor George Harrison

took the front page of the Illawarra Mercury charging the Illawarra Escarpment should be turned into a national park, citing it as the "Kakadu of NSW". Indeed it sounds quite lovely and commendable however barely stacks up against the decision by the same Lord Mayor to develop on Tree Top Glen in Thirroul and The Garden Of Peace at Stanwell Tops. The irony is profound as are similar contradictions you will find in Wollongong City Council's environmental protection strategy. You need only nod your head southwards on Mt Keira to see a long tall smoke stack gazing right back at you. Problems with Port Kembla Copper have been frequent and disastrous, the air we breathe is harmful, yet those who campaign against such harm are barely heard.

Sandon Point has picked up the environment v. development debate and offered it to Wollongong City Council on a platter. In response the council argue about how much should go to whom, and decide in the end, that the developers should have the most. It is an unfortunate reality where community consultation means two hundred residents storming a council meeting, demanding to be heard.

