

In opening this statement we would like it to be clear that different people in the group had different expectations and experiences throughout the week. This is a collection of those various experiences and diverse opinions.

EXPECTATIONS

Without much prior knowledge of either AAN! or ACT UP's structure and history in any direct manner, our expectations as far as inter-group dynamics were concerned were very open. This obviously became a problem throughout the week. This problem will be addressed later in this evaluation.

The one thing our group did want to accomplish as a separate unit, with the support of the other groups, was an autonomous Quebec issues demonstration. We also felt a lot of time and space was open for spontaneous action, such as a chance to address womyn's issues working with womyn from the other groups.

We were all interested in the knowledge and experiences the other groups had in regards to AIDS activism. We were also interested in how the groups functioned and in the different approaches to structure that AAN! and ACT UP have found to be effective for their respective groups. With this information we could derive what we felt would work best for our own particular group, as well as what wouldn't be satisfactory for our own situation.

OFFICE SPACE / STAFFING

To a certain extent, staffing problems were inevitable as little communication between the groups took place before the week of the conference, and therefore, little or no decisions were actually made about the structure of the office staffing. Also, we had little knowledge of each others working structures: size, concerns, skills, availability, interests. The presence of specific committees for specific issues, with representatives from all participating groups may be an answer to this problem. AAN!'s idea for facilitating teams would have been an extremely useful tool had it been adopted. Taking into consideration all of the problems that existed, the centre ran surprisingly smoothly in respect to staffing and the weeks accomplishments.

AIDS AND POLITICS

At the last evaluation meeting during the week, there were some feelings expressed in regard to AIDS as a "single issue." Some individuals felt that there was far too much discussion about "people's politics" instead of the "real issue" - AIDS. In our group, some individuals feel that it is impossible to separate one's politics from an issue such as AIDS. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ethics are all AIDS related issues. Gay men are still being blamed for AIDS, transmission through womyn is still ignored, people can't afford treatments, young hispanic womyn are one of the fastest growing groups of people who are testing seropositive. Separating politics and AIDS is an impossible suggestion. The personal is political, and all politics are connected and related.

Personal discussion about individuals' experiences during the week, be they positive or negative, are a necessary part of what we call "Activism." We also place importance on process. Some individuals in our group felt that our way of dealing with planning and working was completely ignored due to lack of communication, and assumptions on process.

Some concern in our group was expressed around the splintering and isolation of issues. We realize this is necessary for focus in demonstrating. But many people felt the issues were so isolated that it detracted from the other facets of the issue of AIDS. We felt that the anonymous testing demo was effective in that it was inclusive of everyone: prisoners, heterosexual womyn and men, lesbians, gay men, prostitutes, people of different racial groups, etc., as opposed to some other issues that were pinpointed, such as the lesbian and prostitutes demo. Many of us feel that the issues are interrelated and dividing ourselves up suggest we are prioritizing different groups of people. It also sets us up against each other instead of the institutions. Lesbians are ignored because female transmission is ignored. The institutional assumptions are that non-sexual "good girls" (i.e. lesbians and heterosexual women) couldn't possibly transmit HIV and hyper-sexual "bad girls" (i.e. prostitutes) like to do nothing better. Of course these are important points. But these issues are ALL issues concerning female transmission, testing trials, access to information and are all interrelated within institutional representation of womyn. Dividing ourselves makes us easier to attack and sets us against each other (should funds go to womyn or lesbians or

prostitutes, etc., because if we make distinctions, there's no way we're all going to win.) The careerists make distinctions to make money, we should be fighting it, not buying into it!

Some individuals in our group also expressed concern about the lack of sensitivity concerning racism during the weeks activities. Not only was racism ignored as an element in other issues, there were various specific events that seemed to involve racism. For example, the way the Chinese students issue was handled at the opening demo many in our group found to be offensive. We were asked for a silent moment and never bothered. Another incident was over dominant verbal presence of people representing groups from Western industrialized nations at the "Third World" Solidarity" support demo. people were not listening, applauding, or supporting those who spoke in languages other than English. They didn't even remain quiet while non-anglophones spoke, so those that did understand could listen.

We were also told that the language issue was irrelevant and more than a few hostile incidents occurred, such as protest when the phone at the centre was answered in french. We had been told that ignorance was the reason for the lack of sensitivity. However, John had researched the Quebec situation thoroughly and had a document readied prior to the week of the conference that was not distributed.

The fact that translation was considered RéAction SIDA's responsibility, and the fact that language was considered an issue only RéAction SIDA should be concerned with we feel is irresponsible on the part of incoming groups. We felt a lack of sensitivity to the location of activism, and a lack of respect for culture and language, as opposed to working within that setting. We feel it to be the responsibility of everyone to recognize the community in with they working and to communicate accordingly.

Another problem that some people in our group had about the week was that some very important issues were not addressed, such as prisoners and AIDS.

SEXISM AND PATRONIZING

Many of the womyn in our group felt "less visible" and "less necessary" than some of our male counterparts. Many people felt that tasks were classified and assigned different levels of status, therefore assigning a hierarchy within a collectively run group. Some people felt "patronized" in our group for reasons such as age and inexperience in AIDS activism. We felt that there

was a disregard for other kinds of group relations and working structures, such as collectivity and working by consensus, other than the dominant ones present, such as making decisions through voting. Different structures were perceived as a lack of structure. Thus, when we tried to explain "how" we do things (collectively by consensus) we got lectured on "why." We were asked "Don't you realize this is important?" The answer is yes, but how we function is important too.

These are just our major concerns. At the same time - the opening demo was fantastic (despite the China incident). We truly appreciate the support we received at the Quebec issues demo. Perhaps next time there should be more focus on larger issues, with fewer demos. Both we and the media lost energy half-way through the week. But coverage was generally positive.

With all of the immediate work necessary there was not nearly enough information sharing. We would like to know more about treatments and general information that would be useful to us. We would also like to be kept updated on your future plans.

Sincerely,
RéAction SIDA

cc ACT UP

cc AIDS Action Now!