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Security guards attempt to prevent demonstrators from entering opening ceremonies

PLWAs make their voices heard AIDS activists take over major AIDS conference

MONTREAL—For the first time the voices of people living with AIDS/HIV took centre stage at an international AIDS conference. Activists made their presence felt in almost every aspect of the 5th international conference in Montreal from June 4-9.

Sunday June 4 Taking over

Just before the official opening of the conference on Sunday afternoon more than 300 activists from Reaction SIDA in Montreal, AIDS ACTION NOW! (AANI) in Toronto and ACT UP New York City were joined by others in taking over the opening ceremonies. The protest was aimed at the marginalization of people living with AIDS/HIV from active participation in the conference and at Brian Mulroney, who was to speak that afternoon. The opportunity was also used to release le Manifeste de Montreal—an international declaration of the rights and needs of people living with HIV disease.

The demonstration started with a march in front of the Palais des Congrès conference site but when it became evident that access to the conference was possible, we marched right in and joined the delegates. The activists then seized

the stage chanting "ACT UP, fight back, fight AIDS!" and "Silence = Death." Many from the crowd came up to join us and to cheer us on as we chanted "Join us! / Joignez-vous!"

Tim McCaskell of AANI welcomed the delegates and opened the conference "on behalf of people living with AIDS in Canada and around the world." McCaskell and Eric Smith of Reaction SIDA protested the inaction and neglect of the Canadian government and called for the firing of Alastair Clayton, head of the Federal Centre for AIDS. Chants of "History will recall, Mulroney did nothing at all" filled the huge conference room. Conyers Thompson of ACT UP read le Manifeste de Montreal which demands all governments and medical authorities respond to the global crisis in a way that is immediate and is defined by the needs of the people most affected. Activists were joined by most of the attendees in cheering each of the provisions of the Manifesto. Almost the entire body rose to their feet in support.

Many of the protestors then left the hall but more than 60 people living with AIDS/HIV and AIDS activists occupied seats reserved for various government, military and bureaucratic dignitaries. AIDS activists pointed out that the \$500

registration fee prevented most PLWAs from attending the conference. Conference organizers refused to begin the opening ceremonies until they left. Finally after the activists moved back a couple of rows the official opening began. The delay was solely the responsibility of conference organizers who were reluctant to proceed with so many PLWAs and activists present.

"We have altered these conferences forever" said Tim Powers of ACT UP. "Each delegate, all the organizers, and every government official will remember that people with HIV disease demand to be included in the decisions that affect our lives—particularly this and future international conferences. From now until a cure is found, the voices of people living with HIV disease will be included."

The ceremony opened with a video called "At Risk" showing how heterosexual youth around the world can avoid AIDS. At its conclusion one activist yelled out "What's missing from this picture?" Many members of the audience yelled back "homosexuals."

Kevin Brown, a founding member of the Vancouver PWA Coalition (now the PWA Society), had been invited to speak—the first time a PLWA was to have addressed

the opening ceremonies. Kevin Brown died on May 9 but left behind a video that was shown in the opening ceremonies. This tape dealt eloquently with his struggle against AIDS and his involvement in establishing groups of PWAs such as the Vancouver Coalition. Unfortunately Kevin Brown's and the Coalition's fight against the Mulroney government to get AZT released in Canada was not mentioned. Even though this video was no substitute for a political speech by a PLWA, activists and other audience members joined in giving the video a standing ovation in recognition of Kevin's achievements in getting the voices of PLWAs heard.

When Brian Mulroney began to speak hundreds of activists turned their backs on him to protest his government's criminal neglect. A banner reading "Mulroney—You've Left Us To Die/Tu Nous As Laisés Crever" was unfurled by AANI supporters. Mulroney's speech was repeatedly interrupted by boos and hisses. After trying to suggest that he had actually cared about Kevin Brown, he declared that "This illness is everyone's business." Trying to get the Canadian government off the hook he stressed the need for private fundraising initiatives to fund research. When he finished his speech Mul-

rony received sustained boos from many in attendance and chants of "The Whole World Is Watching—Mulroney Has Left Us To Die." Later Tim McCaskell of AANI stated that "We are incensed that the Prime Minister was invited to speak at such a conference. His government has totally failed to plan or provide treatment for an epidemic that is now nine years old. He then told us we should set up volunteer fund-raising organizations to pay for research. We don't believe we should have to hold garage sales to pay for the health care we deserve. The government must fund community based support, education, and research initiatives."

The final speaker was Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia, whose son died of AIDS in 1986. He called the question "Where did AIDS come from?... not just irrelevant but stupid." He continued "AIDS is here, it is killing us... A cure has to be found at any price... including the highest price... the drastic reduction—indeed stoppage—of our resource wasteful programme for the wanton destruction of ourselves through nuclear weapons." He called for the world to divert "our massive resource of dollars and roubles... to the more

Continued on page 7