

Feds delay National AIDS strategy

AIDS activists plan to put on the heat

The long-awaited National AIDS strategy promised by Federal Health Minister Perrin Beatty for the end of 1989 has been delayed again. According to Alastair Clayton, of the Federal Centre for AIDS, such a strategy will not be ready until next summer. Other federal officials suggest that the strategy will not be ready until the spring. And this is in the eighth year of the impact of the AIDS epidemic on Canadian society—eight years of criminal federal neglect of the needs and concerns of people living with AIDS and HIV.

A 56 page draft "working document for development of a National Strategy on HIV infection and AIDS" was prepared by Sadinsky and Associates (who have no special expertise on AIDS/HIV) for Health and Welfare Canada in October 1989. This working document was to provide the basis for consultation between various state, professional and community-based groups and to lead towards a national strategy by the end of 1989.

This document, the many flaws and limitations of which will be mentioned below, is being held up according to Clayton because of the delay in consultation with the provinces and with non-governmental organizations. Apparently a number of provinces have been slow in responding to this document. The

delay has angered the Canadian AIDS Society (CAS—a coalition of AIDS community groups) and others who fear that their core-funding will be endangered if there is no National Strategy soon (many cannot wait another six months to find out if there basic funding will continue or not) and who want other positive AIDS action in the very near future.

It appears that there may be substantial differences within the provincial and federal AIDS and health bureaucracies over what strategy to adopt in dealing with AIDS. Interestingly, the future of institutions like the Federal Centre for AIDS was not even mentioned in the draft strategy document.

Perrin Beatty promised community-based AIDS groups and AIDS activists that he was going to be very different from his predecessor, Jake Epp. He promised that he wanted to consult with AIDS groups and with groups representing people living with AIDS (PLWAs) and with others to finally develop a National AIDS Strategy.

Some AIDS activists warned at the time that there were dangers in falling for such a period of "consultation" if we did not visibly keep up the political pressure on the federal government and health bureaucracy. A lengthy process of dialogue and consultation, it was



Philip Hannan

Despite the continued protests of people living with AIDS and HIV, the federal government continues with its criminal, life-endangering negligence

feared, could lead to a lessening of pressure on the federal front for positive AIDS action. What has happened is that most AIDS groups did opt for giving Beatty some time for this process of consultation. As a result pressure for action has slipped on the federal level as groups met with Sadinsky and his associates or with Beatty and as

valuable months have slipped by with no action being taken. Some had assumed that Alastair Clayton of the Federal Centre for AIDS was on his way out. In his long term in office he has done virtually nothing to help PLWAs regarding treatment delivery concerns. Many have been surprised to see that he is still around and is

5000 demonstrators converge on St. Pat's Church in New York

AIDS and abortion rights activists target Catholic Church

NEW YORK—In a dramatic and militant protest which was the largest U.S. demonstration ever, nearly 5000 demonstrators took over Fifth Avenue in front of Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral December 10th,

denouncing Cardinal John O'Connor's opposition to gay rights, safe sex education, and abortion.

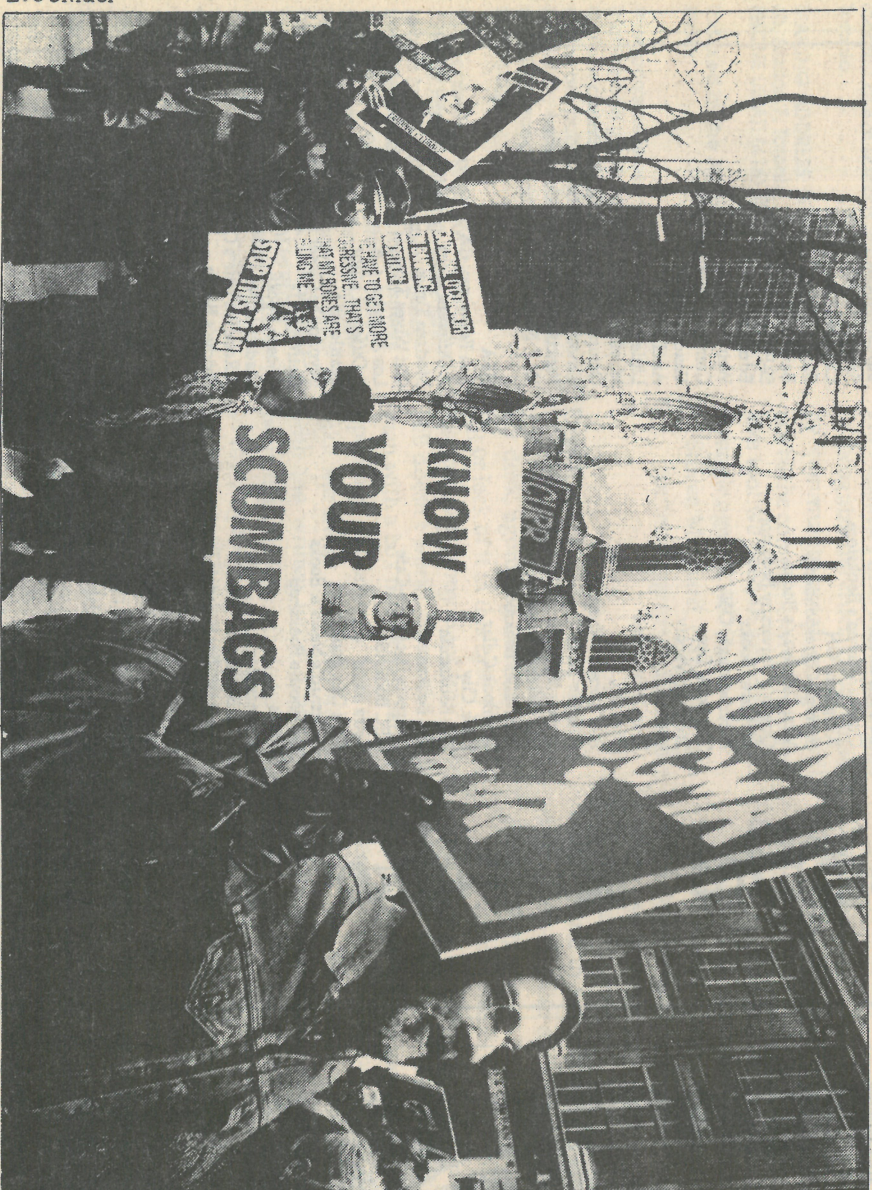
The most militant aspect of the protest, organized by the AIDS Co-

alition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the Women's Health Action Mobilization (WHAM), took place when a number of activists moved inside the cathedral, shouting slogans, throwing condoms in the air,

and staging "die-ins," interrupting O'Connor's 10am high mass—at which both outgoing Mayor Ed Koch and Police Chief Richard Condon were present. The visibly agitated cardinal attempted to get the congregation to drown out the protest with prayer and later had copies of his sermon distributed, because he was unable to deliver it verbally.

Outside a huge sign proclaiming "Cardinal O'Connor: Public Health Menace" stretched almost a city block while demonstrators chanted "You say 'don't fuck'; we say 'fuck you.'" and carried signs saying: "Curb Your Dogma" and "Stop This Man," along with photos of O'Connor.

The demonstration was fueled by years of intense struggle between the Catholic hierarchy, which has considerable political power in the city, and lesbian, gay, and women's organizations. Virulent Church opposition to New York's lesbian and gay civil rights bill, for example, was certainly a factor in delaying passage of the legislation through City Council for a solid fifteen years. O'Connor has repeatedly opposed distribution of condoms, clean needles for IV drug users, and safe-sex education in the public schools, as well as directing bishops to debate whether AIDS is God's punishment for homosexuality and drug abuse, arro-



Lee Snider

Demonstrators chant "You say 'Don't fuck', we say 'Fuck you!'"

gantly declaring that "good morality is good medicine."

Considerable anger against O'Connor also derives from his campaign to ban Dignity, the large lesbian and gay Catholic organization, from church premises across the U.S.

Additionally, O'Connor has supported Operation Rescue, a fanatically anti-abortion group which obstructs access to abortion clinics, and he has said that he would like to be arrested with them except for contrary advice from his lawyers.

The daring action inside the cathedral precipitated a barrage of criticism by much of the media, including some gay and lesbian organizations, over the tactics involved. Some 111 arrests were made by police, including 43 inside the cathedral.

But ACT UP and WHAM, in a statement declared that "our cause—preventing the deaths of thousands around the country—is important enough to invade any space, disrupt any speech. As long as the epidemic rages and the Church fights in direct opposition to policies recommended by responsible doctors, scientists, and health officials, ACT UP will never be silent. Not in the streets, not in the Capitol, and not even in the Church itself.

John Willson