

On political support and gay rights

by David Pepper

The importance of recognizing and supporting politicians who truly understand lesbian and gay issues has taken on critical importance in the era of Brian Mulroney and George Bush. This was symbolized by two important and historic events that took place in Canada and the United States in November of last year.

The re-election of Svend Robinson as a Member of Parliament on November 21 is an important milestone for lesbian and gay rights in Canada. An important signal has been sent out that no longer is it necessary to simply respond to the intolerance, ignorance, and homophobia of our straight society by knuckling under to their fears, problems, and hatreds. Instead, we can rejoice in the fact that we can be visible, we can claim power, and we can make a difference!

On the same theme in America—an important event took place in San Francisco on November 27 in the form of a vigil in memory of two progressive and gay positive individuals. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in US history, was a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He worked closely with Mayor George Moscone until his and Harvey's assassination on November 27, 1978.

The tremendously moving candlelight vigil is held annually to commemorate the anniversary of the murders of these two progressive individuals. It remains important for two reasons. First, lesbians and gays have few public heroes and since the life of Harvey Milk was taken from our American brothers and sisters, and indeed all of us who work for progressive change and lesbian and gay liberation, it is important to remind the rest of society that we too have our heroes, our role models, our teachers, our visionaries. We must always work informing people why we believe it is important to remember and display our pride.

Second, and as important for lesbians and gays, the anniversary has begun to provide coherent and effective voices against the onslaught of the right wing agenda which has been solidified by the recent re-election victories of Bush and Mulroney. On the Tenth Anniversary of the murders of Harvey and George, we were reminded of the importance of vigilance by the eloquent lesbian feminist Sally Gearhart who spoke about San Francisco as an oasis in Bush's America. (George Bush was soundly trounced by over 100,000 votes in San Francisco during the recent election.) Bush is still in power—but people know that they want something *other than* George Bush and, as Doonesbury puts it, his "kinder, gentler, doo doo."

San Francisco, an island of progressiveness in Bush's America, has a Mayor, Art Agnos, who not only leads gay pride marches with his family, but speaks to the gay community as if they were a family. On the evening we remembered Harvey and George, Art Agnos spoke of light and hope. Light, the powerful symbol, which lit up Market Street with 20,000 candles, was everywhere that night. People were solemn and hopeful. We cried when Joan Beaz sang to us as she sang ten years earlier when Harvey Milk was murdered. And we cheered when a rolling Baptist minister lashed out at the religious bigots who continue to use religion as a condemnation of our sexual orientation.

Ten years have passed and, rather than forget the tragic days following Harvey's murder, San Franciscans have only become more aware. They still flock to see *The Times of Harvey Milk* at the Castro Theatre. In fact, on the day of the march, 1,250 of us filled the Castro and watched. The strong emotions are still lit throughout the movie and the power of Harvey Milk's history still moves people to weep openly as they watch. They are still unforgiving of the Dan Whites and Diane Feinstein—and they express it through hissing.

Each hiss however only reminds us of the current and future enemies of the lesbian and gay community. It has been only as recent as the last year in Canada that the Prime Minister has been publicly homophobic, the federal Minister of Health has continued to neglect test drugs for people living with AIDS, the Ontario government has launched a campaign on AIDS information which totally neglects our community, there has been an anti-gay threat to the Secretary of State's Women's Program, and finally we have a government which continues to refuse to fulfill the nearly three-year-old promise to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination. The lesbian and gay community must not remain silent when it comes to supporting politicians who have *consistently* been on our side in a pro-active way. Silence and complacency from representatives who haven't been on our side is simply not good enough. They do not deserve our support.

The recent election has shown us we could face little progress in areas dealing with lesbian and gay liberation. We of course still have Svend, and thankfully we lost some homophobes such as Jim Jepson, John Ostrom, Dan McKenzie, and Ron Stewart. We do not yet know where their replacements stand. In Toronto, it was unfortunate that Doug Wilson was unable to win in Rosedale. However, his candidacy was a victory in itself. And sadly, we did not re-elect some people who were important to our community—specifically Marion Dewar and Michael Cassidy. It is disappointing that Ottawa has in the last sixteen months lost two indefatigable friends of the lesbian and gay community in Michael and Evelyn Gigantes. Certainly their absence will make it more difficult for lesbian and gay concerns to be part of our provincial and federal representatives' commitments to real change.

New research emphasizes cofactors, optimism and innovative treatment

AIDS

U.P.D.A.T.E
• By Sean Hoseir •

Special Report on HIV and the Immune System

Many people who are HIV infected but have no symptoms, as well as much of the medical establishment, do not think that serious damage has occurred until a person's T4 count falls below 400. According to recent research from the Netherlands, however, the decline of the immune system begins long before the T4 count drops. In an analysis of the blood of HIV infected but asymptomatic men, researchers found that their white blood cells responded slowly and inadequately when challenged. But the most serious defect was found in the B-cells (which make antibodies). B-cells from 13 out of 14 men failed to produce antibodies despite the presence of normal levels of T4 cells. The scientists found that HIV infected only a tiny fraction of blood cells, yet this was enough to damage the immune system and lay the ground-work for AIDS to develop. *Journal of Clinical Investigation* 1988;82:1908-1914. These results provide further evidence to suggest that from the moment a person learns he/she is HIV infected, that he/she begin treatment with antivirals/immune boosters.

Luc Montagnier (co-discoverer of HIV) Talks About AIDS

"AIDS does not inevitably lead to death, especially if you suppress the cofactors that support the disease. It's very important to tell this to people who are infected. Psychological factors are critical in supporting immune function. If you suppress this psychological support by telling someone he's condemned to die, your words alone will have condemned him. It simply isn't true that the virus is 100% fatal.

Excerpted from the December 1988 issue of *OMNI magazine*, pg 134.

Anti-HIV Agents—Japanese Antivirals

Scientists in Japan were the first to exploit the anti-HIV properties of dextran sulfate. They also discovered that the antiviral effect increased as the sulphur content of the drug increased; ordinary dextran has no effective anti-HIV activity. So they began experimenting, adding sulphur to many compounds and have now formed potent antiviral compounds. The drug lenthanin, which is extracted from mushrooms, has been used by some HIV infected people as an im-

mune booster, but when sulphur is added, it becomes a powerful antiviral. It protects cells from being attacked by (1) HIV, (2) other infected cells and it neutralizes the enzyme RT (reverse transcriptase) which is needed if new viruses are to be made.

The drug, SPG, is used in Japan by women to treat cancer of the cervix. When sulphur was added to it, SPG showed potent anti-HIV activity. The more sulphur that was added, the greater the antiviral effect. *Intl. J. Immunopharmacology* 1988;10:34.

Soluble CD4

One anti-HIV therapy that seems less toxic than all others is the use of the drug soluble CD4 (sCD4). The CD4 molecule, which is present on the surface of certain cells is what allows HIV to enter a cell. By flooding the body with sCD4, it is hoped that the molecules of sCD4 will bind with the virus and protect cells from HIV infection. In tests with monkeys infected with SIV (which causes AIDS in monkeys) sCD4 improved the health of most of the animals. The drug had no serious side effects and drastically reduced the amount of free virus in their blood. sCD4 also protected the bone marrow from viral infection. Tests are underway in the USA to find the right dose of sCD4 to use in HIV infection. *Nature* 1989;337:367-370.

Immune Boosters—Inuthiol or DTC

French scientists have released the results of a one year study of the immune booster Inuthiol/DTC in 26 people with ARC. They were given the drug by mouth at a dose of 10mg/kg once a week. The average T4 count increased by 100 cells and their immune system was less suppressed. DTC also prevented the people with ARC from developing AIDS. Most of the people in the control group who remained untreated became worse. *Intl J. Immunopharmacology* 1988;10:36.

Tagamet

The T4 cells are the soldiers of the immune system and also help to activate it when the body is under attack. The T8 cells keep the immune system from over-reacting and getting out of control; they suppress immune responses. Normally there are more T4 cells than there are T8 cells. In AIDS, however, there are more T8 cells than T4's. Some scientists have thought that if it were possible to reduce the amount of T8 cells that the immune system could be made stronger. Tagamet, brand name of the drug cimetidine, is used to treat ulcers. Research has shown that it helps improve the immune system. The drug seems to work by inhibiting the T8 or suppressor cells. No one has tested tagamet on HIV infected people. *Immunopharmacology and Immunotoxicology* 1988;10:327-332.

Zinc as an Immune Booster

The mineral zinc plays an important role in the proper function of the immune system. Many of the various hormones that are produced by the immune system are made using zinc. Doctors in France have treated a small group of HIV infected people who had low blood levels of zinc with supplements of the mineral. Patients were given orally, mg/day of zinc gluconate for 45 days and then 45 mg for 8 days. After examining the blood of patients the doctors concluded zinc supplements had enhanced immune system of the patients. *Intl. J. of Immunopharmacology*

Adoptive Immunotherapy

Researchers have often tried to rejuvenate the immune system of people with AIDS by injecting them with various products of the immune system. Most of these experiments have not been successful. Now a group of scientists in London, England, have extracted white blood cells from people with HIV infection and incubated them in a solution of IFN-alpha AZT for three days. The cells were then transfused back into patients, who went on to experience weight gain, loss of fever and swollen lymph nodes. Their levels of cells remained the same. *Intl J. Immunopharmacology* 1988;10:37

Nutritional Aspects of AIDS—Vitamin B12

Researchers have found around 25% of people with AIDS have vitamin B12 deficiencies. If the patients did not have these, they had problems absorbing the vitamin. *JAMA* 1988;260:nc This indicates that many HIV infected people have intestinal damage leading to malnutrition and the weight loss that is common in AIDS. The damage may be a result of HIV and CMV infection. *Lancet* 1988;2:748.

AIDS and Weight Loss

A characteristic of AIDS is severe weight loss. The origin of the weight syndrome is not clear and it has several causes although levels of TNF may play a role in it of weight. Doctors in Chicago treated 13 people who had weight loss with the drug megestrol acetate 80mg orally, 4 times/day. All patients subsequently gained weight. The drug did not affect their immune system because; of the patients died despite gaining weight. Even though all patients stopped losing weight doctors now want to conduct a placebo trial of the drug. *Ann Internal Medicine* 1988;109:841.

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