

AIDS ACTION NEWS!

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AIDS ACTION NOW! RESPONDS TO FEDERAL AIDS STRATEGY

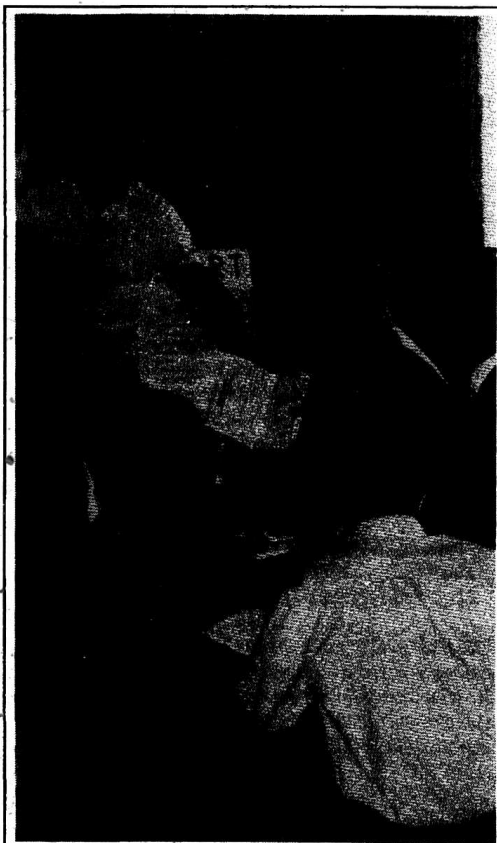
At the Vth International AIDS Conference in Montréal in June 1989, the then newly appointed Minister of Health and Welfare, Perrin Beatty, promised to put together a national AIDS strategy for Canada. This strategy, as it turned out, took one year to be developed, rather than six-months as the minister had originally promised. Even when completed in June 1990, it failed in many ways to organize the action needed to turn around the fight against AIDS in this country.

This result is not surprising. These kinds of failures are common to political "strategies" of this sort. The sheer difficulty, and the consequent lack of success in trying to draft an inclusive "strategy" for AIDS was also illustrated in December of 1988 at the Ontario Provincial Consensus Conference on AIDS. What should have produced a uniform and coordinated policy for the province merely resulted in an enormous expenditure of money with little or nothing to show for it at the end of the day.

The national AIDS strategy was designed basically to solve the political problems the Minister and the Department of Health and Welfare faced with regards to AIDS, rather than the specific problems faced by people with HIV infection. The strategy, in other words, was designed from the standpoint of the federal government.

Of course, one of the political problems the Minister faced was AAN!, especially our demand for better access to treatment. By way of contrast, the needs of groups like the HIV primary-care physicians who were not taken to be a political problem for the minister were ignored by the "national strategy." In politics, as elsewhere, it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.

While AAN! worked hard to influence the "national strategy," it was also important not to let the "strategy" come to set our agenda. We did not want their tail wagging our dog. For example, in the spring, before the strategy was released, AAN! saw an opportunity to advance the idea of a national treatment



AAN! members (clockwise from top left) Marie Louise Adams, Tim McCaskell, Ric Hatt, Doug Wilson, George Smith and Russell Armstrong huddle to score the federal government's AIDS strategy report card at the Harbour Castle Westin Hotel, Toronto, on June 28, 1990.