

will have severe effects on women, especially single mothers. Many unions took part in the march, as well as some newly formed women's groups responding to the crisis of violence against women. In Quebec it is estimated that about 18% of all women have been abused by their

tion to the recent illegal strike by Alberta nurses, the current crisis in the state of health care in that province, and the negative impact of free trade on women. A seminar was held during the week on Women and Free Trade sponsored by Edmonton Working Women, Women's Commit-

ment that focused on women and racism. In Vancouver rain dampened the illegal march and demonstration but not the spirits of the 400 participants. There were lots of women, and lots of energy. It was followed by an "information celebration" where speakers took up the theme of poverty and in-

well as local issues such as the Native women land claims in BC and the establishment of the abortion fund in that province. In Iqaluit, N.W.T. about 40 women turned out to the women's centre bringing their "Pieces by Women" which were poems, music, crafts, artwork etc. that they had

lives. The issue of violence against women was also discussed as it is a major concern to women here just as it is across the country. —Celest Nat with special thanks to CKI Women's Caucus and news s

500 Join AIDS Action Now! Protest

TORONTO—On March 25th AIDS Action Now!, the new gay AIDS activist group (see *Rites* last issue), held the first rally, march, and candlelight vigil ever in this city to protest the federal government's delays in not releasing promising new AIDS drugs as well as its trial procedures for testing these drugs. Starting with a rally at the 519 Church St. Community Centre we marched past Tory cabinet minister David Crombie's office where we loudly proclaimed our opposition to federal inaction and bureaucratic red tape on AIDS, particularly the lack of approval of and release of drug therapies for AIDS-related disorders.

We then marched to a silent candlelight vigil outside Toronto General Hospital where drug trials are scheduled to proceed on aerosolized pentamidine (AP) which is known to be effective in combating AIDS-related pneumonia (PCP), as part of a cross-country study. Unfortunately the protocol for this study developed by the drug company Fisons, the federal Health Protection Branch, and medical officials, is currently calling for the use of a placebo.

This means that some of the people entering into this study will receive nothing but water. Given that some of the people will develop PCP during the period of the drug trial this means that some people will receive nothing of any use to them. According to statistics provided in the protocol itself this would mean that from 3-4 people will die during the period of this study because of the use of a placebo. AIDS Action Now! calls for no placebo in the AP studies—which bluntness put only means the murder of some people. To dramatize this, four coffins were carried at the front of the March 25th procession.

It was only after months and months of pressure from PWAs, AIDS activists, and some doctors with large numbers of AIDS patients, that these drug trials on AP were even proposed. As of today the only approved drug for AIDS-related treatment in Canada is AZT which has very serious side-effects in some people. AIDS Action Now! at its founding meeting of close to 500 people on February 4th called for AP drug trials across the country for

treating and preventing PCP but also called for no placebo's to be used in these studies. In response to the proposed use of a placebo in these studies, more than 20 Toronto doctors in the HIV Primary Care Specialist Group called for people not to participate in the study unless the placebo section in it was removed. While it is standard scientific and bureaucratic procedure to use a placebo in such a study, Dr. Philip Berger, on behalf of the doctor's group, wrote to Dr. Mary Fanning, head of the AIDS clinic at Toronto General Hospital who was one of the specialists who proposed an AP study to the federal Health Protection Branch, saying "There must be a more compassionate way."

The proposed AP study outline calls for 300 volunteers who have had just one episode of PCP, excluding those who have had multiple episodes and those who have survived more than six months after their first episode. Many of the people who most need AP are therefore excluded from the terms of the proposed study leaving many to wonder if 300 volunteers who fit this rigid criteria could even

be found. Dennis Conway wrote letters on behalf of AIDS Action Now! to Dr. Mary Fanning, the University of Toronto Ethics Committee (which must approve the study), Fisons, and various government officials supporting the position adopted by the primary care physician's group and arguing for revising and altering the proposed study. In these letters, Conway expresses the position of AIDS Action Now! that to withhold treatment from half the participants is wrong and is unethical since AP has demonstrated its effectiveness and because of the serious morbidity and mortality of recurrent PCP. After pointing to the 3-4 deaths that are the likely result of the proposed study, he states: "This is completely unacceptable. These deaths are also unnecessary since previous studies already provide historical controls."

Conway's letter also criticizes the information provided for volunteers in this proposed study arguing that since enough accurate information is not provided that informed consent is not actually obtained for the study. In the face of continuing govern-

ment inaction and red tape and the use of placebo's in AP trials, AIDS Action Now! is currently taking steps to ensure that PWAs who need want to use AP can get this drug treatment under medical supervision. AIDS Action Now! is planning further protest activities against the federal government's and medical establishment's lack of concern for the needs and lives of PWAs. The group can be contacted at Glad Day Bookstore, 598A York St., Toronto, ON, M4Y 1Z3.

—Gary Kinsir

If you've had PCP, you may need pentamidine.

Call 591-8489.

The Pentamidine Project organized by

AIDS ACTION NOW!