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In Brief

by W.C. McRae

ACLU commission asks for community involvement

The Legislative Committee of the ACLU Commission on Gay and Lesbian Rights met with liaisons of endorsing organizations on November 19 to discuss progress on the proposed gay/lesbian rights legislation. The measure will extend the categories of non-discrimination laws to include "sexual orientation." After explaining the wording of the bill, the committee discussed the implications of the recent elections for the bill's passage. The projected vote count in the Senate is encouraging, but the count in the House is less so. "We have a big battle ahead of us," said Committee Chair, Kristine Chatwood.

Burton White, who chairs the Commission, says that, "We're seeking people to get active." People interested in helping attain gay rights for Oregonians are urged to call the ACLU.

Information is needed on how best to lobby individual legislators. Although it is not yet time to confront your legislator, the ACLU needs to know how best and by what means, to approach specific legislators in order to influence them favorably. Inside information on legislators is particularly welcomed, according to several commission members.

The Commission is also seeking people, particularly from rural areas, who would be willing to testify to discrimination in Oregon due to sexual orientation.

White also stressed that "leaders and helpers" were needed on Commission committees. Presently, there are task forces on fund-raising, AIDS and civil liberties, community education, and legislation.

It is estimated that it will require \$10,000 to promote and pass a gay rights bill. No contribution to the Commission is too small — or too large.

The Commission next meets in Eugene on Dec. 9. To offer your participation, call the ACLU office at 227-3186.

Condoms exhibit bullish growth

In an effort to further reduce risk of AIDS transmission through the blood supply, the US Food and Drug Administration last month issued new recommendations that expanded the list of those who should not donate blood to include prostitutes and their heterosexual customers. The recommendations target "Men and women who have engaged in prostitution since 1977 and persons who have been their heterosexual partners within six months."

But delegates to the Second International Whores Convention held last month in Brussels, Belgium, claimed that only prostitutes who use intravenous drugs are at risk for AIDS. A representative from San Francisco claimed that of 463 women — about a third of whom described themselves as prostitutes — who tested for HIV antibodies in that city, only four percent tested positive, of which all were IV drug users. Delegates did, however, advocate the use of condoms and safer sex. A New York activist said, "The prostitutes here overwhelmingly endorse the use [of condoms] and want governments, brothels and pimps to insist that clients use them."

And use them they do. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, condom sales in the US have grown dramatically in the past few years. The increase is attributed in part to fear of AIDS. An estimated half the present market is women. It could be otherwise: condom companies are reportedly skittish about acknowledging the gay market, and refuse to advertise their product directly for use in anal intercourse.

It's a growth industry, however. Sales are

expected to increase 40% over the next few years. Condoms presently constitute a \$200 million industry. *Fortune* reports that in the past year the price of a share of Carter-Wallace Inc., who make Trojan condoms, has risen from \$37 to \$85.

Catholic inDignities

To the sound of progressive doors slamming, the Catholic church issued a harsh attack last month on gays and organized gay Catholic groups. In a letter from the Vatican addressed to bishops, gays are described as "disordered," and homosexuality is characterized as "an intrinsic moral evil." Although Dignity, an organization of gay Catholics, is not named, the harshest attack is reserved for groups that "misled the pastors and the faithful" in attempting to "ignore" or "undermine" the teaching of the church on homosexuality. The letter urges that all support should be withdrawn from gay Catholic groups. In an apparent reference to AIDS, the letter also implies that homosexuality "seriously threatens the lives and well-being of a large number of people." The Catholic hierarchy is also enjoined from supporting gay civil rights, which the letter described as "civil legislation . . . introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right."

The document is thought to be a response to liberal teachings of some Catholic theologians, primarily in the US, who have questioned traditional moral teachings of the church, particularly regarding tolerance of gays and lesbians. Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle in 1983 officially welcomed a Dignity conference to Seattle, and allowed Dignity to say Mass in St. James Cathedral. The Archbishop's decision to allow Dignity to use the Cathedral was cited specifically by the Vatican when last month it forced Hunthausen to relinquish authority over sexual and moral issues in the diocese to an auxiliary bishop. In 1983, Hunthausen had written that "Gays and lesbians should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights."

Portland Dignity spokesperson Glen Shrope said the Vatican letter was "depressing." He claimed that the move was not unexpected. "We had anticipated this from John-Paul," though "the American church doesn't seem so uptight [as the European church] and to an extent there's room for maneuvering."

Shrope acknowledges that Portland is not as liberal as Seattle, and newly-installed Archbishop William Levada is known to be more conservative than his predecessor, with whom Dignity had a liaison.

When asked how it felt being a member of a church that publicly discourages his involvement, Shrope stated that he doesn't "doubt either the Church or Dignity," stressing that "there's a human side to the Church that muddles along. Some of us are nervous and concerned, but we intend to continue."

The Church's pronouncement on homosexuality is one of many recent moves by the Vatican to affirm dogma in the face of progressive change, particularly in the US church. Father Charles Curran was stripped of his license to teach theology for presenting alternatives to established doctrine; an 11-year-old girl was expelled from parochial school for voicing support of abortion; the Archbishop of New York now denies access to Catholic forums to public officials who dissent — or are held to dissent — from dogma. A week after the letter to the Bishops, Rev. John J. McNeill was officially stripped of his priestly functions because he refused to give up his ministry to gay people. McNeill, author of *The Church and the Homosexual*, is now effectively expelled from his religious order.

The full text of the letter can be obtained for \$3.00 from Origins, the National Catholic News Service, 1313 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005.

EVENTS

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