

## HIV-positive prisoners on medication strike

More than 100 HIV-positive prisoners in Vacaville, Calif., are risking their lives in a medication strike to protest what they charge is discriminatory treatment and severely inadequate medical care from prison staff and authorities.

The inmates of the T and U wings of the California Medical Facility prison at Vacaville decided to begin the dangerous strike on Sept. 19 after six prisoners with HIV died in less than one week.

ACT UP San Francisco held a press conference outside the gates of the Vacaville prison on Oct. 1 to bring attention to the situation inside. Activists read letters from HIV-positive inmates describing the conditions inside. One prisoner said he was writing in order "to share the absolute wonder of how this has been allowed to continue for so long. Dear people of great consciousness, without you we are doomed, for the powers that are in place now have a carte blanche to treat us as lepers, miscreants...and being allowed to disregard the fact that we are human beings.

"We have an administration of medical doctors that somehow believe that this is a punishment from God," the prisoner continued. Talking about a fellow prisoner who died in his cell, he said, "This poor soul walked the hallways for over four days. He was complaining of severe headaches, nausea, dizziness and a host of other ailments. The medical technician told him he had to wait to see a doctor. On either the fourth or fifth day, this man was found dead in his cell. And I have to ask why? Why was this man allowed to live and die in such torment? And why was his death not considered to be of consequence? Who can help us?"

The inmates charged that the HIV unit at Vacaville is understaffed. Three AIDS doctors have left within the past few months, and the prisoners charge that those doctors who remain do not have the expertise or the caring to provide adequate services.

Dr. Jan Diamond, one of the three AIDS doctors who left the prison in the past few months, acknowledged that the facility does need more medical staff.

"I feel like the biggest problem is we need more AIDS-competent physicians. I think there have been some problems. Some very well-meaning physicians are doing the best they can. Some get jaded and don't have supportive attitudes toward patients," she said. "If someone finds us a physician who is AIDS-sensitive and is willing to work for the Department of Corrections, they'd roll out the red carpet."

The HIV-positive prisoners say they are also being discriminated against. They report being segregated from HIV-negative prisoners and double-celled in an area of the prison that has no electricity, which means that there are no fans or ventilation. The temperature rises as high as 100 to 110 degrees inside the cells.

The striking prisoners presented their demands to prison authorities in a meeting on Sept. 30 and were not promised that any would be met.

Their demands included: the hiring and retention of AIDS-experienced doctors, timely diagnosis and treatment of HIV and AIDS, no forced segregation, an end to double-celling, access to phase 2 and 3 clinical trials, equal visitation rights, voluntary and anonymous HIV testing, immediate release for prisoners with late-stage disease and no reprisals against striking prisoners.

Solange Books, a communications representative for the California Department of Corrections, confirmed several of the prisoners' complaints. Brooks admitted that the HIV-positive prisoners are, in fact, segregated, that HIV testing is not anonymous and that the prison system's compassionate-release program is very limited.

She said that in order to qualify for compas-

sionate release, a prisoner must have less than six months to live, must not have committed a violent crime and must be deemed "not to pose any danger to society." If the prisoner passes those three tests, his or her case is processed for six weeks at the CDC headquarters in Sacramento and then goes to the courts. Brooks admitted that the least amount of time it has ever taken any prisoner to be released was four months, leaving him or her two months to live outside the prison gates.

"There is a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation out there about our program. I would say we're on a par with the medical service provided to the outside population. And we're a lot better than other places." Brooks clarified that she thinks the treatment at Vacaville is as good as the treatment at San Francisco General Hospital.

Though representatives from San Francisco General Hospital refused to comment on Brooks' statement, members of ACT UP and CHAIN, the California HIV Activist and Inmate Network, pointed to the fact that prisoners with AIDS in California live only half as long as people with AIDS on the outside and questioned why the more than 100 HIV-positive prisoners at Vacaville would risk their lives if the care meets the standards of the hospitals outside.

Rachel Timoner

## Look who's coming to the House (and Senate)

A record number of African-Americans, other people of color and women are expected to be seated in Congress next year, thanks in part to the current desire for change in government. Redistricting in some states has helped to concentrate the strength of "minority" voters also. "It will be the most dramatic increase in the number of women and people of color in the history of Congress at one time," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Georgia. Carrie Meeker, granddaughter of enslaved people and daughter of a sharecropper, will become Florida's first African-American in Congress since 1876. Illinois Democrat Carol Mosely Braun appears likely to become the first African-American woman ever to be elected to the U.S. Senate. Political analysts estimate that an additional 12 African-Americans and five Latinos are likely to be elected this fall.

Jim Hunger

## Two millionaires challenge Studds

U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds, D-Mass., one of America's two openly gay congressmen, faces two millionaires in the Nov. 3 election, one of whom targeted Studds with "family values" rhetoric last time around.

In 1990, Independent Jon Bryan knocked Studd's victory margin down from 1988's 68 percent to only 53 percent.

Stopping short of direct gay-bashing, Bryan told voters Studds' "permissiveness" was sickening and that it was time to put "a family man" in office.

Last month, Bryan wrote his campaign another personal check for \$100,000 and warned, "We are going after [Studds] 1,000 miles an hour."

Studds also faces millionaire Republican Dan Daly, former state undersecretary for economic affairs, who also has the resources of liberal Republican Gov. William Weld behind him.

"The race is likely to include relentless, negative, personal attacks against [Studds]," says spokesman Will Woodruff.

The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, the Washington group that funnels money to lesbian and gay candidates, has thrown its resources behind Studds.

Rex Wockner

# 1-800 GET LILY



Buy any of Lily's classic videos!  
Buy the entire collection and receive FREE as a bonus a piece of the woman we all adore.\*

\*A lock of Lily's hair captured forever in a crystal inspired plastic pendant. Be the envy of all your friends!! Not available in any Jewelry Store anywhere!!

While supply lasts.



Order classic Lily Tomlin videos including her Broadway Hit, "THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE"

ORDER BY PHONE TOLL-FREE!  
1-800 GET-LILY  
FAX: 1-800 HAD-LILY  
7 DAYS A WEEK • 24 HOURS A DAY

ENTIRE VIDEO COLLECTION \$120.00 (Retail value \$140.00)  
Postage & Handling \$3.50 for 1st video/\$1.50 for each additional video.  
CA Residents add applicable sales tax.

OTHER GENUINE CELEBRITY ARTIFACTS AVAILABLE.

SEND TO: P. O. BOX 27759, LOS ANGELES, CA 90027

Now For Something Completely Different...

## COME JOIN US

MEET MEN

MEET WOMEN

## FOR GAY SQUARE DANCING

IT'S EASY

IT'S FUN

NEW WEDNESDAY EVENING CLASSES

WE'RE EASY

WE'RE FUN

STARTING NOVEMBER 4TH, 7:30-9:30

AT THE EASTSIDE BAR  
3701 S.E. DIVISION

For More Information:

Call Doug, 331-0745

## THE COME OUT FORUM

A Discussion & Resource Group

(All levels of "outness" welcomed & desired)

8:00 pm THURSDAYS

\$4/person to defray cost of space & refreshments

\$2/person for any graduate of Carol Steinel's Come Out Class

Facilitated & organized by Carol Steinel

## COME OUT CLASSES

A six week course to come out without losing your house, your job, or your mind.

FOR EVERYONE

THURSDAYS, 7-8 pm

11/12/92 - 12/18/92

(11/26 class moved to 11/25 due to Thanksgiving)

\$30 for six sessions (includes dues for Come Out

Forum attendance following class sessions)

FOR LCP MEMBERS ONLY

MONDAYS, 7-9 pm

11/16/92 - 12/21/92

Call LCP 223-0071

Sliding Scale \$15-30

No one turned away for inability to pay.

CALL Carol Steinel at 371-3748 for info, place, & registration

A RENAISSANCE WOMAN PRODUCTION