

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXII, Number 25, 12 October 1987 — Washington rally calls for gay rights [ARTICLE]

Washington rally calls for gay rights

By Miles Pomper

WASHINGTON, D.C.—More than half a million people converged on Washington, D.C. yesterday to demand increased funding for AIDS research and civil rights for gay Americans.

About 50 Columbia students associated with the Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance (CGLA) joined the crowd in urging greater access to possible AIDS cures, federal gay civil rights legislation, and enhanced funding of research of and care for AIDS.

The students said they came to Washington because they believed that movement towards equality for gays has been halted in recent years, and in some ways, reversed.

“It’s important to hold onto the rights we’ve achieved and keep on making progress,” Joe River, CC ’89, said. “We have to remind people that we’re still a part of the community.”

Joining the large numbers of students were groups as diverse as the Gay Men’s Health Center, the National Organization for Women, the United Farm Workers, and Punk Lesbian Epic Poets for Gay Rights, and from all areas of the country including 30,000 demonstrators from California gathered under the slogan,

“For love and for life, we won’t go back.”

The demonstrators marched past the White House towards the Capitol, breaking into chants such as “2-4-6-8, how do you know your friend is straight?”, and “Ho, Ho, Hey, Hey, half the Ivy League is gay.”

And while they chanted and carried placards such as “Cross Dress and Cease Fire,” and “Better blatant than latent, better latent than never” there was a darker side to the march’s festive atmosphere—the fear of AIDS, which was expressed in T-shirts simply exclaiming “I’m dying” and orders not to get too close to the AIDS patients in the front, and a quilt with the names of 2,000 AIDS victims on it placed in the Mall.

A first year social work student summed up many people’s feelings.

“When you participate in something like this,” said Ed Tilley, “You can’t help but remember all the people who aren’t there, all the friends who died of AIDS.”

This fear was also reflected in the speakers’ criticism of Ronald Reagan’s Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome policy.

“When we give him money he spends it on Star Wars, when we have to raise quarters and nickels to fight a disease that’s killing us,” said actor Robert Blake.

Robin Tyler, coordinator of the march, also denounced Reagan and his evangelical supporters as hypocritical. She said they might call homosexuals “sick,” but “Sick is when you allow thousands of people to die, because of your immoral self-righteousness.”

Tyler compared the Republican Party to a prophylactic and she suggested the symbol be changed to one.

“It gives pricks protection and a false sense of security when they’re getting screwed,” Tyler said.

She also said that gay rights were entering a new era and mainstream America will have to learn to accept it.

“America, twelve and a half percent of the little boys and girls growing up are going to be lesbians and gays, and they’re not going to be called “faggots,” “dykes,” or “sissies,” Tyler remarked.

The Rev. Joy Parry concurred, “To the U.S. Supreme Court we say you will never get us to hide in the closet again, on these days, millions of Americans are burning down the closet.”

The Rev. Jesse Jackson said that heterosexuals would have to accept homosexuals as people have had to learn to accept other minorities.

“America is not one color—a blanket of one cut cloth—America is a quilt, made up of many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, where everyone fits, everyone counts, everyone must have equal protection under the

law," he said.

Jackson, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for president, said the demonstrators should work with him to bring a new peaceful order to American life.

"We should end the violence, and the unkindness, and the meanness against everybody."

Harvey Firestein, the author of the film *Les Cages Aux Folles*, said they had already accomplished that goal by the march itself.

"We did it with love, we did it with caring, we did it with caring for everyone, we did it as a family."