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World AIDS Day

Link up the struggle against HIV globally

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Since AIDS was first identified among gay men in the USA in 1981, the association of HIV has led to global stigmatization of sex between men, and a repathologizing of homosexuality.

Lesbian/gay activists have sometimes dropped other lesbian/gay political work in face of the urgency of the epidemic or succumbed to pressures towards institutionalization or professionalization. But also the necessary responses to HIV in many countries have allowed a new social and political space, which has been expressed in particular by a challenge to the power of the medical establishment, a questioning of the way the authorities fulfil their responsibilities with regard to public health and the demand that people with AIDS themselves exercise control over public health measures. This also makes possible increased resources for the development of gay organizations and more open public discussion of sexuality and sexual practices. In many countries a new generation of lesbian/gay activists, both in terms of their age and their process of radicalization, have taken leadership in AIDS advocacy, education and service organizations while gay communities have borne heavy loads of care-giving and grieving. The experience of gay activism has often been channelled into the leadership of the peer organizations of people with HIV, and lesbian and gay organizations have found themselves in activist alliances with drug injectors and people who make their living in the sex trade.

AIDS is now the fourth leading cause of death in the world; in Africa it is the leading cause of death. In the African and Asian countries where the AIDS epidemic is the most intense, unprotected heterosexual sex, not unprotected sex between men, is responsible for the greatest majority of infections. Yet in Southern and Western Africa, in Latin America and in Southern Asia, gay communities are experiencing very high levels of infection, illness and mortality.

The global fight against HIV requires the linkage of several dynamics of struggle:

- against stigma, discrimination and isolation

- against heterosexism and sexism

- against racism and imperialism

- for democratic rights and the right of oppressed groups to organize autonomously

- against censorship and religious control of education, welfare and health services

- for the defeat of the ‘war on drugs’

- for free and effective health care

- against the super-profits of the international pharmaceutical companies.

In particular we stand in solidarity with those who are battling against drug companies who are barring access to drugs in the Third World at more affordable prices. The success of the campaign against the pharmaceutical companies in South Africa has many important implications. The battle brought together AIDS activists, trade

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unionists and anti-globalization activists in a broad and successful alliance. Most of those involved, notably COSATU and the Treatment Action Campaign, have subsequently recognized that the battle now needs to be joined on two new fronts: (1) to demand that the South African government - and also the employers - provide drugs; and (2) to build opposition to the US government's actions in taking Brazil to the WTO over the question of generics.

All this has meant that the fight against HIV has become integrated in the minds of millions with the fight against globalization.

In addition to the intrinsic, human importance and urgency of the struggle against AIDS, doing AIDS work among men who have sex with men can be a useful way to begin work for lesbian/gay liberation in countries that do not yet have lesbian/gay organizations.

This is an excerpt from the resolution on lesbian and gay liberation adopted by the most recent Fourth International world congress, in 2003. It is online at <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article177>.