

By Kathryn Phillips

SAN FRANCISCO

OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, FOR THE first time in a dozen years, the left in San Francisco has a shot at putting one of its candidates in the mayor's seat.

If it succeeds, the election will mark the end of an era of Chamber of Commerce-oriented leadership that began in 1978 after crazed Supervisor Dan White smuggled a pistol into City Hall and murdered liberal Mayor George Moscone and gay Supervisor Harvey Milk. If they fail, a boost would be given to a trio of interest groups that threaten the city's soul—downtown high-rise developers who have spent the last decade chipping away at the city's famous low-rise skyline; landlords who oppose the city's rent-control ordinance and most other attempts to preserve affordable housing; and supporters of U.S. Navy plans that would increase the military's presence in San Francisco.

"San Francisco has been an island of sanity while the rest of the country shifted to the right," observed Jim Lansdowne, chairman of the Political Action Committee of the Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club. Yet over the last decade, under Mayor Dianne Feinstein, the left has watched its influence at City Hall dwindle. Now, if Feinstein's chosen successor is elected, Lansdowne fears that "we may never be able to gain the momentum and strength that the progressive movement once had in this city."

Underdog Agnos: In the polls, Feinstein's choice, Supervisor John Molinari is leading the left's candidate, Democratic Assemblyman Art Agnos. But the margin is so narrow—much slimmer than most would have predicted earlier this year—that a December runoff is nearly guaranteed November 3. Underdog Agnos is a 10-year veteran of the California Assembly. An intelligent, brash, impatient man, Agnos is often compared to Mario Cuomo, as much for his physical appearance as for his approach to politics.

He is regarded as one of the Assembly's most liberal and most effective legislators, willing to push hard and wheel and deal to get what he wants in Sacramento. He has marshalled through important AIDS legislation, including a pioneering bill protecting the confidentiality of people undergoing AIDS antibody testing. He has been a steady proponent of a state law to protect gays and lesbians from job and housing discrimination. Closer to home, he joined the city's progressives and backed Proposition M, a successful measure designed to control development. Agnos also has opposed allowing

Mayoral election gives left new opportunity

the Navy to make San Francisco home for the battleship Missouri and its fleet of escort ships.

The son of Greek immigrants, Agnos, 48, has said he knows what it is to feel like an outsider. Yet he is a product of one of the city's—and state's—most established liberal political machines, whose members have included Philip Burton, George Moscone and current Lt. Gov. Leo McCarthy. He can also

SAN FRANCISCO

count himself among a list of politicians who have, during volatile campaigns, found themselves treating the press to embarrassing revelations. In Agnos' case, the revelations included loans received from a Sacramento developer and delinquent payment of income taxes on profits from a land deal.

Agnos said recently that he felt he had successfully overcome any negative fallout from those revelations. But in the final weeks of the mayoral campaign, Molinari's camp has begun to pounce on the loan and tax issues in campaign literature.

The neighborhood candidate: Molinari, 51, a former Republican who switched to the Democratic Party five years ago, is in many ways Agnos' opposite. In his 16 years on the city's Board of Supervisors—the equivalent of a city council—Molinari has built a strong connection with neighborhood groups, responding quickly to demands for stop signs or more neighborhood recreation programs. But when it comes to larger, ideological issues that shape the future of the city, Molinari sides with developers and the downtown business community. He opposed Proposition M, voted to allow the Navy to dock the *Missouri*, and opposes efforts to further limit landlords' ability to raise rents on recently vacated apartments.

Business and development interests have shown their appreciation for Molinari's support with generous campaign contributions that have helped make this the most expensive mayor's race in the city's history. By late September Molinari had already raised more than \$1 million, about \$180,000 of it from major developers. Agnos had raised nearly \$600,000, about \$60,000 of that from developers.

Whether Agnos will be able to overcome Molinari's money and lead in the polls depends in part on whether a left coalition can deliver the votes. So far Agnos has won endorsements—and volunteers—from key tenants groups, the city's three most influential environmental groups and several ethnic political organizations.

But organized labor has split on the two candidates. The building trades, dependent on construction jobs, generally favor Molinari. Retail workers and restaurant workers favor Agnos. The San Francisco Labor Council avoided a potentially divisive stance and endorsed both candidates.

And the gay and lesbian community, which represents about one-fifth of the city's registered voters, provides the greatest uncertainty. Agnos' leadership in gay rights and related issues should give him a head start in garnering most of the city's estimated 55,000 gay and lesbian voters. But several factors have hampered Agnos' efforts. Some gay activists still resent that in his first race for the Assembly Agnos ran against and beat Harvey Milk. Also, Molinari has carefully cultivated a strong relationship with the gay community, particularly its more affluent members.

Worse yet, for Agnos, one of politics' weirder alliances was formed earlier this

is most visible in the community's political clubs, where both political camps have been fighting hard for endorsement.

The Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club, arguably the most liberal and influential of the community's three Democratic organizations, bucked club member Britt and came out last spring for Agnos. Meanwhile, membership in the community's two other clubs swelled while supporters from either side joined en masse to participate in the clubs' endorsement votes this summer and fall.

Among the new members was one prominent lobbyist for a downtown developer. He is, by all reports, an acknowledged heterosexual. By the time votes were taken at the two clubs, said one Agnos campaign staffer, straight club members probably outnumbered gays.

In the end, one club endorsed Molinari and the other made no endorsement after neither candidate could win the 60 percent needed.

For Britt, endorsement of Molinari has proved embarrassing on at least one occasion. In August, as Britt eloquently argued at a Board of Supervisors meeting against home porting of the *Missouri*, Molinari proposed softening a city requirement that the Navy not discriminate against gays and lesbians. The suggestion infuriated Britt, who by then had already endorsed Molinari.

"I think it's going to really be a problem for Britt to win for supervisor next year," says Tish Pearlman, a lesbian political activist and political action committee chairwoman for the National Organization for Women's San Francisco chapter, which endorsed Agnos. "Harry's really going to be in trouble if Molinari doesn't win."

Yet others say Britt's endorsement will have little effect on his political future.

"Harry has the best political base because he's been consistently working on rent control," said Ben Gardiner, a gay political activist and Molinari supporter.

Agnos believes Britt's action hasn't hurt his mayoral campaign. "I don't believe he represents what the gay community feels about my contribution to it," Agnos says. In fact, said the assemblyman, Britt has played virtually no role at all in determining the outcome of this critical mayor's race. For now, said Agnos, Britt has been "politically neutered."

But if Molinari wins, the left in San Francisco could find itself politically neutered as well.

Kathryn Phillips is *In These Times'* correspondent in California.

The labor movement and gay community are split between liberal Art Agnos and pro-development John Molinari.

year. Harry Britt, the openly gay member of the Board of Supervisors, who is also a member of Democratic Socialists of America and generally regarded as a strong left voice on the board, endorsed Molinari for mayor in exchange for his support in Britt's unsuccessful bid for Congress last spring.

Gay split: Since then, the gay and lesbian community has been split between Molinari/Britt backers and Agnos backers. That split

JOIN THE HARVEST 3 BRIGADES TO NICARAGUA

- ☐ Dec. 8-29
- ☐ Jan. 3-17
- ☐ Jan. 9-30

Approx. cost: \$540
Excluding round-trip U.S.—Mexico City

Clip and Send:
Nicaragua Network
2025 I St., NW, Ste. 212
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 223-2328
HOTLINE (202) 223-NICA

Special need for health care and Spanish language skills.



Contragate and Counterterrorism: A Global Perspective

Edward S. Herman, Gregory Shank, and Donald Pfozt
on Legal and Definitional Aspects

James Petras, Peter Dale Scott, and Martha Huggins
on State Terror in the Americas

Noam Chomsky and Jan Nederveen Pieterse
on State Terror in the Middle East

Published quarterly
ISSN: 0094-7571

Crime and Social Justice
P.O. Box 40601
San Francisco, CA 94140

Individual issue no. 27-28 \$10.00 + \$1.50 postage
1-year subscription \$25.00
Institutions \$50.00 per year
Add \$4.00 for mailing subscriptions outside the U.S.
California residents add 6% sales tax

By Anne-christine d'Adesky

WASHINGTON

PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF the recent national march on Washington for gay rights was the internal shift that has taken place within the gay community and given rise to unprecedented activity. While the sheer number of marchers—more than 500,000—is an impressive political feat, even more important is the strong gay identity and sense of commitment individuals have developed.

The last gay march on Washington was held Oct. 14, 1979, exactly eight years ago, but light-years away from today in terms of the reigning social and political climate. In the spring of 1977, when the first march was being planned, former San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk was still alive, and Ronald Reagan was viewed as an anomalous curiosity by almost everybody except the extreme right.

What has transpired since his election can legitimately be characterized as an all-out assault on the disenfranchised—minorities, women, gays, immigrants. Add to that the particular devastation AIDS has wrought on the gay male community, and the homophobia it has engendered even within seemingly progressive circles. Only then does the import of the national march take on its true meaning, as a signal both of the emergence of a more unified and organized gay community, and of its integration into the broader civil rights movement.

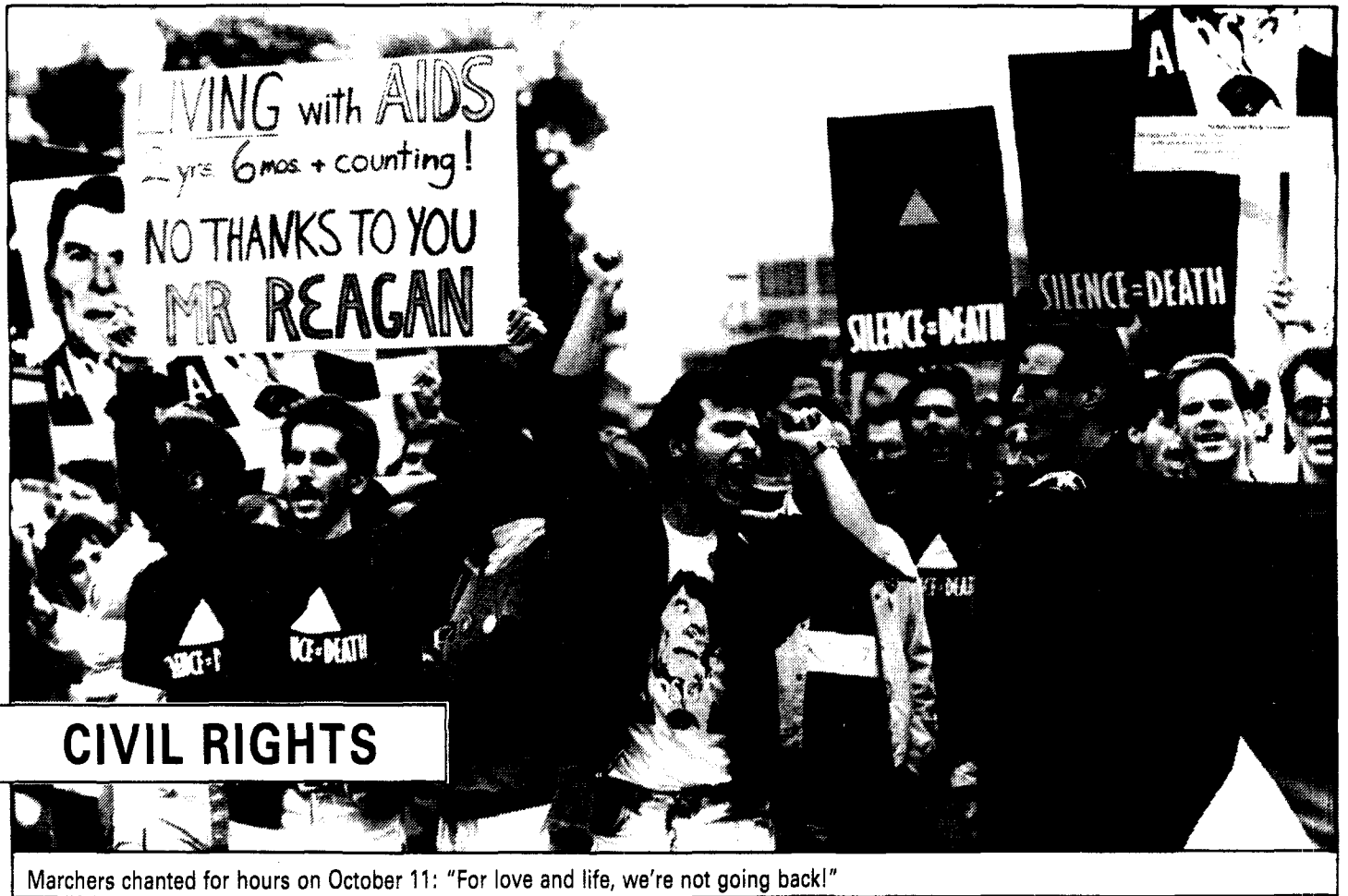
Why march? Just as it is difficult to pinpoint the moment when an emotion gives way to action, it's impossible to select a single catalyst for the October 11 gay march. Some marchers interviewed thought it was the slow-to-surface realization among gay men and lesbians that although AIDS does not discriminate, there is no such thing as impassive neutrality when it comes to the National Institutes of Health, where scientists appear to be playing power politics around AIDS.

That's the view of marcher Chuck G. of Los Angeles, who said, "I never considered myself an activist until now, but AIDS has made me political. As a gay man, my life is on the line and hard as it is to accept, I know I have to fight like hell because no one, except for other gay people, is going to help me."

The proposal for a national march came from the 1979 march organizers, who saw the signs of severe discontent and a need to unite within different gay communities. Only 16 days before the first planning meeting on July 17, 1986, the gay community was dealt a heavy blow when the Supreme Court upheld a Georgia state sodomy law. The law was not new, but the message from the highest court in the country was: homosexual behavior is a crime (*Hardwick vs. Bowers*), even if it occurs in one's bedroom.

From that moment on, spontaneous demonstrations became *de rigueur* for hosts of gay people who no longer believed that the closet would save them from AIDS, Attorney General Edwin Meese or any of the dozens of local and state laws cropping up from the offices of panicked public officials. There was also the shift in the course of AIDS, which the general public could no longer hold at bay by claiming it affected only homosexuals. By the time AIDS and heterosexuals were associated on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*, many straight individuals were familiar with service organizations like Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City. For the first

© 1987 David Vita



Marchers chanted for hours on October 11: "For love and life, we're not going back!"

CIVIL RIGHTS

Gay and lesbian march signals new credibility of rights movement

time, homosexual leaders were sought out by the major media for their opinions on ethics, science and public policy. Around AIDS, gays had gained credibility.

Lessons learned: There are other lessons, too, about compassion, death-and-dying issues, the failure of the private health-care system and insurance, homelessness, housing; areas where gay men and lesbians have organized sophisticated and humane alternatives to deal with AIDS that are emerging as model solutions to problems. The black and Hispanic communities now recognize the common threat AIDS poses to their members—gay, IV drug users, homeless

The October 11 national march on Washington for gay rights demonstrated not only the emergence of a more unified and organized gay community, but also its integration into the broader civil rights movement.

mothers, teenagers—and its connection with seven years of Reagan cutbacks in services to minorities.

Finally, there is the general coming apart of the Reagan administration and the imperious righteousness of the Moral Majority, from Ollie North to Jim and Tammy Bakker.

There are other elements in the march's success story, a powerful one being the collective need to mourn the thousands who

died before the community had time to respond. Several marchers compared the procession to an ideal wake—the kind where relatives and friends are brought together to recall the life of the deceased, and the impact that person had on the world. A wake where the spirit of the deceased and the living merge, where humor and love mingle with grief.

It is no coincidence that a massive gay wedding took place the day before the march, or that a giant memorial quilt for those who died of AIDS was unveiled at dawn on October 11. Both events reflect a maturity and desire for ritual and tradition that is new in the gay community, and stems from powerful emotions that death and loss wrest forth: love of self, of community, of culture.

And pride. A pride that was noticeable among marchers, even veteran activists who felt a renewed connection to the intangible notion of what it means to be a gay man or a lesbian. "We're not afraid anymore," said one marching lesbian. "We're not afraid of each other and we're not afraid of them. That is what has changed."

Nor do "they" appear as afraid of gays. "They" now include non-gays: bisexuals, straights, parents, public officials, supporters. This year a bisexual contingent had its own banner, a new community "coming out." Mainstream newspapers ran editorials encouraging heterosexuals to attend the march, while the official march poster proclaimed, "Gay or not, it's time to speak out!"

"How can you consider yourself a progressive person and support homophobia?" asked Scott, a heterosexual engineer who declined to give his last name. "You can't. It's the same thing with AIDS and other issues. You do yourself a disservice by pretending it's somebody else's problem when it really is yours. Gay rights is mine. AIDS is mine. South Africa is mine," Scott summed

up with a smile.

Common ground: Rev. Jesse Jackson, a speaker at the post-march rally, hammered home the same point. "We are here on common ground," said Jackson, referring to all the displaced people in America—gay men, lesbians, blacks, autoworkers, farmers. "This generation must fight, but let's fight the right fight and not each other," he added.

March organizers estimated that 840 gay activists were arrested October 13 in a mass civil disobedience action at the U.S. Supreme Court. More than 4,000 supporters—parents, straight friends, lovers—watched and cheered as wave after human wave was dragged away by police, some wearing gloves. Groups of persons with AIDS (PWAs) were among the arrested. As *In These Times* went to press, many of the arrested had refused to pay the \$100 bail and had chosen to remain in jail in solidarity with the many prisoners with AIDS in the U.S.

Gay marchers demanded, among other things, a gay civil rights bill, an end to sodomy laws and state and federal laws that discriminate against PWAs and those at risk (or perceived at risk) for the illness, and an immediate increase in federal funding for AIDS education, research and treatments. Whether or to what extent they will achieve these goals depends on their continued commitment to fight an administration that has shown little sign of backing down from its anti-gay agenda. It also depends on the now quickly shifting political climate and the ability of the left to unite.

One thing is clear: the gay community has come into its own as a powerful and integrated part of the civil rights movement. As gays chanted for hours on October 11: "For love and life, we're not going back." □

Anne-christine d'Adesky is a New York-based freelance journalist who has covered AIDS since 1984.