

ACT UP resurrected, Gen. Pace targeted

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WHAT'S IMMORAL?: ACT UP members lead a protest at the Times Square military recruiting station March 15, garnering support from founder Larry Kramer. Other attendees included former New Jersey Gov. James McGreevey, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Forman and Village Voice columnist Michael Musto. Photo: Wockner News/Andrés Duque

About 250 people picketed the Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Manhattan March 15 in what is being seen as the likely resurrection of ACT UP.

The picket was organized two nights earlier at New York City's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center after activist and writer Larry Kramer gave a rousing hour-long speech on ACT UP's 20th anniversary.

"We must realize that gay people are hated," Kramer said in an interview. "I want this new ACT UP to be an army confronting this hate in every way we can."

The target of the demonstration was Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who on March 13 told the Chicago Tribune: "I believe homosexual acts between two individuals are immoral and that we should not condone immoral acts." He went on to compare homosexuality to adultery.

Several well-known individuals attended the Pace protest, including Kramer, former New Jersey Gov. James McGreevey, author and radio host Michelangelo Signorile, columnist Michael Musto, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Foreman, longtime activist and TV host Ann Northrop and blogger Joe.My.God.

Foreman and Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum were arrested for obstructing traffic and “their rainbow flag was taken into custody.”

At one point, Foreman and Kramer knocked on the door of the recruiting station, which seemed closed for business.

Asked if the legendary ACT UP now is officially back, Kramer, who launched the original organization in 1987, said: “We’ll see ... These are the delicate first weeks to see if the troops coalesce or drop by the wayside. Like the Sondheim song, we are ‘putting it together, bit by bit, piece by piece.’ That is how it was in [1987]. We didn’t know where we were going, we just figured it out. The needs are different now. Then it was AIDS and now it is utter sheer hate hurled at us right and left.”

Since the demonstration, ACT UP announced several additional actions in New York City, including one targeting a live airing of Garrison Keillor’s “Prairie Home Companion” and a large demonstration in favor of universal healthcare.

Keillor, radio personality and writer, apologized to gays upset by the March 14 installment of his syndicated newspaper column, in which he wrote: “Gay marriage will produce a whole new string of hyphenated relatives. In addition to the ex-stepson and ex-in-laws and your wife’s first husband’s second wife, there now will be Bruce and Kevin’s in-laws and Bruce’s ex, Mark, and Mark’s current partner, and I suppose we’ll get used to it.

“The country has come to accept stereotypical gay men — sardonic fellows with fussy hair who live in over-decorated apartments with a striped sofa and a small weird dog and who worship campy performers and go in for flamboyance now and then themselves. If they want to be accepted as couples and daddies, however, the flamboyance may have to be brought under control. Parents are supposed to stand in back and not wear chartreuse pants and black polka-dot shirts. That’s for the kids. It’s their show.”

In an apology posted on his Web site, Keillor said the writing was “tongue-in-cheek” and asserted that his column was meant to be funny, not offensive.