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ACT UP marks 20 years with housing protest **Activists say people with AIDS often targeted for eviction**

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Activists hoping to return the clang of street protests to the fight for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of ACT UP by staging protests in San Francisco and New York on Thursday.

Several dozen people demonstrated outside a real estate agency in San Francisco's Castro district, and hundreds called for reforms in housing and health care at a protest near Wall Street.

The San Francisco protest -- coordinated by the new ACT UP/Bay Area and Gay Shame -- focused on people with AIDS losing housing in the Castro, which the demonstrators called "the AIDS eviction capital."

Some demonstrators lay on the ground in front of a new Coldwell Banker office near Market and Castro streets as others drew chalk outlines around them. The group said real estate agents have helped convert housing in the neighborhood into condominiums and tenancies in common, and that shift has pushed out gay people and people with AIDS and HIV.

"People with AIDS are targeted and pushed out because they are in long-term, rent-controlled apartments," said Tommi Avicelli Mecca, a housing activist who spoke with a megaphone outside the real estate office.

Demonstrations like this -- organized by ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and other groups -- were common during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. One of them shut down the Golden Gate Bridge during a morning rush hour in 1989.

But they have waned, and longtime activists -- including the writer Larry Kramer, who called earlier this month for a new gay guerrilla street army to address gay rights -- are skeptical that younger people will mount such protests without facing a threat as deadly as AIDS.

Kramer made that call to action in an impassioned, if unspecific, speech in New York.

A similarly fiery speech by Kramer 20 years ago about lack of response to AIDS led to the formation of ACT UP.

Kramer said that today's judges who rule against same-sex marriage and politicians who vote against laws to expand rights for lesbian and gay people are "equally threatening as AIDS" used to be.

"I think the courts that continue to deny us our rights are evil," Kramer said. "We are not equal, and I'm sick of it, and every gay person should be sick of it and every gay person should be ashamed if they're 'passing.' "

Following Kramer's speech this month, demonstrators in New York protested outside a military recruiting center in Times Square in response to Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, calling homosexuality immoral.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, was among those arrested at that military protest in Times Square.

"I do feel that the time for direct action is back," said Foreman, who was last arrested at a protest in 1991. "One thing the movement has lacked for many years is a left flank. We got where we did with AIDS because we had ACT UP on one hand and the professionals in suits on the other."

Foreman was referring to organizations that work within established channels -- like the Human Rights Campaign and his own group -- when he used the term "professionals in suits."

Foreman said activists, out of exhaustion, abandoned street action once the AIDS crisis peaked in the gay community.

"Direct action takes a spark, it needs a spark, and we have had a few sparks along the way -- like Matthew Shepard -- but we haven't had the right spark at the right time," Foreman said.

Rebecca Logue-Bovee, 53, attended the San Francisco event and said the issues around AIDS should still be sufficient to draw street protests.

"It still kills our brothers and sisters, and not just in the queer community. Everybody should be out (in the streets)," said Logue-Bovee, a former member of ACT UP in Los Angeles.

A 27-year-old student in San Francisco who gave his name as Mary Treadmill and who helped organize Thursday's protest said there is "potential for something larger" to come from the recent actions, but it will be challenging to reach people his age and younger.

"People only five years younger than me have no idea what ACT UP is," said Treadmill, a member of Gay Shame.

Cleve Jones, a longtime activist who organized demonstrations in San Francisco's gay community prior to the onset of AIDS, now gives lectures across the country where he meets many younger gay and lesbian people who are not fervent about gay rights issues.

"The situation today is very different. I would love to see more street activism, but I don't think we're going to see people get off their butts and confront the power structure till they feel a lot more threatened," said Jones, founder of the AIDS Quilt.

Some young people are getting active, including gay and lesbian Christians who are currently traveling to conservative religious schools across the country to speak out against the condemnation of homosexuality, but those efforts are not widespread.

And even with the recent actions that resulted from his speech, Kramer is not sure street-level activism will re-emerge.

"I don't know that I'm expecting a great deal, which almost pains me, but I would like to be proved wrong," he said.

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