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march

WASHINGTON -- Gays from many parts of the country are scheduled to gather in Champaign, Ill., over Thanksgiving weekend to discuss plans for a mass gay march on Washington next spring.

But apparently most of the people who will represent Washington-area organizations at the Champaign convention will bring the message: don't come.

Sponsor of the convention is an organization called the National Gay Mobilizing Committee, with an office in the student union at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana campus.

Starting last July, they have issued a series of mailings to gay groups seeking support for the idea of a march on Washington. It would press demands for "repeal of all sodomy and solicitation laws and full civil rights for gays," according to the initial mailing.

More detailed demands, as well as a date, would be set at the convention in Champaign, set for November 23-25, later NGMC mailings said. Of course, the convention could decide there shouldn't be a march, but the mobilizing committee obviously hopes that won't happen.

The politically active gay organizations in Washington, however, wouldn't mind a bit if the march doesn't happen. Their objections center mainly on deep skepticism that a large enough crowd can be attracted to such a march to avoid embarrassment.

Larry Maccubbin, president of the Washington Area Gay Community Council, expressed this skepticism in a letter to the mobilizing committee following a discussion of the march at a WAGCC meeting. Explaining that several gay organizations in the area are trying to develop community service programs and to strengthen the gay community's position with the city council and with Congress, Maccubbin's letter said:

add two

~~Suppx~~ Voicing this viewpoint was Don Goodwin, president of the Mattachine Society of New York. To get "nationwide support" for such an action, he said, "you have to have goals to go after, such as national legislation, or something in the Supreme Court. You've got to have a bill. We're nowhere near having a nationwide bill. WE're having enough trouble in New York City, just passing something through the city council. Just to have a demonstration for demonstrkation's sake is not worth anything."

In reply, Graubart said one of the goals of the proposed march is to gain "solidarity" for the gay movement in the country, which Graubart said is now ~~like~~ "isolated" and fragmented. He ~~contd~~ contended that the movement in many places is "ineffective," and that "only a few civil rights bills" have been passed by city councils in the nation.

Further, he said, the march would give the gay movement a boost b "bringing the issue to the attention of the mass media."

"By raising the national consciousness," he said~~k~~, a large/^{national}demonstration "could affect state legislation far more than demonstrations at the state level."

In any case, he said, specific demands would be defined at the convention, if it decides to go through with the march.

Graubart candidly acknowledged that many, but not all, of the people who have helped organize the convention have in the past been affiliated with the Young Socialists Alliance, and some have worked on mass demonstriaions sponsored by the Sxtudent Mobilization Committee. The SMC ~~sp~~ organized several anti~~x~~-war marches and rallies during the Vietnam war, attempting to bring together persons from a wide range of political positions around ~~te~~ single issue of the war.

Similarly, Graubart said, any Washington march would deal exclusively with gay rights and no larger political agenda.

add one

"We do not want to risk any setbacks at this time due to a poorly conceived, hastily planned and shabbily supported demonstration....I can safely say that unless you can guarantee a minimum of 50,000 gays marching down Pennsylvania Avenue, the march will be a political disaster.

"The numbers game is a political fact of life here," the letter continued. "If less than 50,000 gays march, it won't rate a two-inch write-up on the obituary page, much less any serious consideration of the issues by Congress. A small march ~~would~~ will hurt, not help, the movement for justice and equality. "A march of 50,000 is not^a very likely event in Washington," the letter ~~contended~~ contended, because of the high proportion of federal employees who feel obliged to stay in the closet.

Bob Carpenter, vice president of D.C. Gay Activists Alliance, set the minimum even higher. "If they can't come up with at least 75,000 people," he said, "there's no reason to have it."

Washington residents, both noted, are accustomed to seeing an endless series of rallies, demonstrations and processions in town, promoting every cause from ending the war to freeing Lithuania from the Russians. The media tends to be a bit blasé about such things, in the feeling of area gay leaders.~~xxxxxxxx~~

~~Jeff~~ The coordinator for the Campaign for the convention, Jeff Graubart, disagreed, however.

In a telephone interview, Graubart said he thought a march could attract 50,000 gays -- "we could get 100,000 if we do it right." But even 5,000 to 10,000 "would not be bad," he said. "I've never seen a march of ~~by~~ 5,000 to 10,000 be looked down upon for being too small."

Another widely expressed criticism of the idea of a march is that there is at present no immediate goal which could be met by federal legislation. Most gay organizations are trying to deal with local and state ~~and other forms of oppression on the part of~~ ~~state~~

add three

Graubart said a member of the Gay Mobilizing Committee, William Stanley, was planning to go to Washington to make contact with gay leaders here in an effort to rally their support.

He acknowledged that the Gay Mobilizing Committee had stretched a point when it listed Frank Kamery, head of the ~~Wash~~ Mattachine Society of Washington, as one of the persons endorsing the idea of the convention ~~for the purpose~~ (making clear that not all these people necessarily endorsed a march, too).

Kamery responded to the committee's July mailing with a letter which primarily raised a number of questions about the march, but also stating that at that time he was "open-minded about the matter," and making a pro-forma offer to "assist in any way."

"We thought putting his name down would assist," Graubart wryly commented. He said all other endorsements had come in the form of signatures on coupons attached to the committee's mailings.

