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THE POLITICAL-LEGAL PROBLEMS OF AIDS

The question asked with increasing frequency is, "Do you know what GAY means?" The answer is, "Got AIDS Yet?" That's just one of the remarks currently making the conversational rounds as the panic about AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) grows more intense.

The homosexuals have tried hard for years to co-opt the word "gay" and assert themselves as a "civil rights" political action group. History may record that their high water mark was when the Governor of Wisconsin signed a Gay Rights bill last year. Shortly thereafter, the news about AIDS surfaced, and all of a sudden what was out of the closet was not only homosexuals, but their promiscuity, their unusual practices, and their diseases.

Three major differences separate AIDS and other venereal diseases. AIDS is fatal. Most of the victims are male homosexuals. AIDS puts innocent people at risk because this infectious, communicable disease is transmitted through blood and other body excretions such as saliva.

The medical problems of AIDS are now inescapably interlocked with its legal and political problems. Society wants to know how it can protect itself against this rapidly-spreading plague, especially in two areas that intimately affect nearly all Americans: blood banks and the food handling business.

Because the political/legal climate in America has been so dominated by the semantics of "minority rights" and "civil rights," and by retaliations against anyone who "discriminates," homosexuals are not yet barred from giving blood to blood banks. They are merely politely asked not to contribute. As a result of this timidity, blood supplies in certain cities have dropped to dangerously low levels; many people are seeking their own blood donors and building private blood banks.

The morticians in New York City have declined to embalm AIDS victims, but want to put the dead bodies in bags like victims of any other contagious plague. Mayor Edward

Koch wants to stop this "discrimination." Do the morticians have the legal right to protect themselves from the gay plague?

Dentistry has become a high risk occupation because AIDS seems to travel through blood and saliva. May dentists refuse to accept homosexual patients?

The police and paramedics in San Francisco don't want to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to homosexuals. Do they have the legal right to refuse? Are all health-care personnel now at risk?

Reno, Nevada has been the annual gathering place for the "Gay Rodeo." This August, the local residents were less than eager to welcome 55,000 homosexuals. Can the homosexuals be denied public facilities in order to protect the local citizens from disease?

Only a small minority of homosexuals have AIDS. But the majority of those who have AIDS are homosexuals, so they are the high risk group and, because of their immense promiscuity, they are the carriers. Since the incubation period is up to three years, nobody knows how many people are walking around with a deadly infection in their bodies.

In New York prisons, steps have already been taken to protect the healthy by segregating and isolating the homosexuals. Are prisoners entitled to more protection from disease than the general public?

Many leaders and writers long friendly to the homosexual movement have called on homosexuals to clean their own house by closing down the homosexual bath houses, which are the places where AIDS is spread. But that isn't happening.

Why can't the bath houses be closed down as a public nuisance? When Legionnaires' Disease and Toxic Shock Syndrome hit, the authorities acted promptly. Are homosexuals a specially privileged group whose political power enables them to spread disease as part of their "civil rights"?

Next to the blood banks, the touchiest question of all is the food handling business. Small cuts from kitchen knives are a frequent occurrence for anyone who works in the kitchen. Some people are saying they don't want to eat in restaurants any more. Can homosexuals be barred from working in the food handling business, such as in restaurants and as flight attendants on airlines?

The legal questions posed by AIDS are endless and, so far, they have no answers.