

12/4/89

to:the floor
From:Garance

At last weeks Coordinating Committee meeting Larry Kramer brought up the comments and proposals that he had distributed to the floor(We must make tomorrow happen today...and we shall). Rumours have been flying since Tuesday, but I think it best to just give a brief overview of what happened and then some suggestions.

People were brutally honest and human and said fuck being IC, this who I am and what I believe. I had all of my worst fears about ACT UP confirmed. At least (and at last) things came out in the open. Some very eloquent speeches were made, as were some very good suggestions about how ACT UP should prioritize and achieve its goals. People got defensive, people felt hurt, people said what they were thinking and everyone agreed something has got to change. There had been too many discontents stewing for too long--too many unspoken resentments and frustrations. Last Tuesday's meeting was an extraordinarily useful one; it succeeded in clearing the air a bit. Most of us left the meeting friends.

On burning out.

"We are all just ordinary people trying to do something extraordinary."
Vincent Gagliostro

Amidst all the self-criticism and outside criticism and long hours and still trying to do something remunerative and, goddess forbid, have a social or personal life, it is not only nice, but necessary to remember we are only human. There is only so much each of us can give. We must accept as little or as much energy as people are willing and able to give ACT UP. We must also accept that sometimes, if you keep banging your head against a wall, you get a headache. People will get burnt out and leave or take a less active role. This can be a positive thing--it allows new people the space to take on the work and contribute and grow. What is negative is when we get burnt out from fighting within the group. When people despair of ever finding the people to do the work on an issue that desperately needs to be fought--we have got to think of innovative ways to transmit information and rouse interest. The main reason people don't participate in action planning/research is because they don't feel qualified or even know where to start on a given issue/project. Therefore we need:

Teaching Groups:

We cannot continue to deify a few people and say "these ones are the expert experts." What happened to "We are the experts." When a few dedicated individuals are put on pedestals it creates a hierarchical situation in which some people begin to feel undervalued and as if the group doesn't care about the issue they are working on. It also lets people become complacent about the need for each and every one of us to do critical thinking ("I don't have to take action/learn--the experts have it under control.") In singling certain active people out for praise (no matter how well deserved) and deification, it puts others in a more passive role. We cannot fall into the trap of expert/teacher and follower/student. A better method of information sharing than the teach-in (in which a dense and lengthy document is presented in a 3 hr session to up to 75 people) might be through small teaching groups.