

N.Y. St. Pat's Parade Marred by Protesters

"Whose streets?" "Our streets!" "Whose streets?" "Our streets!"

Over and over, the chanting continued as one by one they were lifted into the waiting paddy-wagon. For the third time in as many years, ILGO (the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization) had made it's presence known in New York's St. Patrick's Day Parade. The protest, like a newborn-kitten, has been blindly stumbling around the city trying to establish itself. Unlike the kitten, however, it has not grown and it has gained no sight.

1991 was perhaps the proudest year the gay and lesbian community has known in relation to the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Though they were placed at the rear of the parade and greeted by more jeers than cheers, they marched under their own banner, arm-in-arm with then-mayor David Dinkins. In 1992, they were denied a spot in the parade. A pre-parade protest was staged beginning at the Plaza Hotel. They made it as far as Fifth Avenue where they were stopped by police barricades and forced to participate only as observers. They did manage one major coup, though. For the first time in New York City history, the mayor did not march in the parade.

But success in that area didn't last long. In 1993, the courts finally said that the decision to determine who may or may not march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade falls to the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), the permanent permit holders for the parade.

In 1994, ILGO again protested their exclusion from the parade, this time by staging a protest on the steps of the New York Public Library at 42nd street and Fifth Avenue.

Through news reports and tape recorded announcements on the answering machines of the participating groups, the League learned that all protesters were participating with the intention of getting arrested. They would be charged with blocking traffic and resisting arrest but their goal was to prove their point, to make headlines, to defy the courts.

In 1993, 228 people were arrested. In 1994, there were 102 arrests. Is this growth? When the specific intent was to get arrested, does a decline of 126 people show progress? Does the willing participation of the city's new mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, show progress?

The homosexual community and its supporters are bitter, and they have chosen the Catholic Church as the focus of their anger. One sign reading "This is a 'Catholic' parade...and I'm 'straight'" gave evidence to the protesters feelings on the New York courts' decision. Another group of protesters, including one dressed as a nun, mocked Dr. Donohue and this writer as we videotaped them for our records. Presumably for the benefit of our taping, they began, tambourine in "sister's" hand, to sing their rendition of "God is a Lesbian" to the tune of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." The lyrics are far too offensive for us to allow for reprint in these pages.

Other attacks of the morning included blaming the Catholic Church for slavery and for the Holocaust.

The chant which dominated the protest – "We're Irish. We're Queer. We'll be here every year" – seems to ring less true with each passing year as fewer and fewer come out to support their "cause." The participation of individuals with a homosexual orientation as members of other units in the parade is not at issue here. The issue is ILGO's insistence on marching as a separate contingent.

-KLK