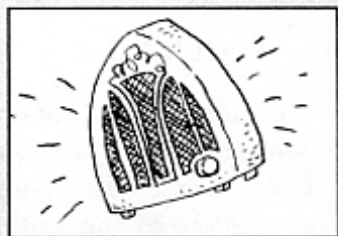


MEDIUM & MESSAGE

READING

Is privacy a lost cause in the computer age? How easy is it for others to access our personal information without our permission or knowledge? Who can legally monitor our phone calls at work and at home? For answers to these questions, check out *The Privacy Handbook: A Practical Guide to Your Privacy Rights in British Columbia*, published by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association.



LISTENING

Tune in to *Voices of the Land*, a 16-part series examining the contemporary crisis in food systems. Feb. 1 Urban hunger and rural-urban linkages. Feb. 8 Community alternatives to corporate food systems. Feb. 15 Ecological linkages between city and country. Feb. 29 Community-shared agriculture.
Wednesdays, 2 pm
Co-op Radio 102.7 FM

BIOGRAPHY

Legacy of goodness and light

New film pays tribute to trade unionist and AIDS activist Jon Gates

by Ken Anderlini

In his doctor's office, a bare-chested Jon Gates holds a capsule in his hand. He explains that this one capsule is worth more than the per-capita annual expenditure on health care for three quarters of the world's population. Eighty per cent of the resources dedicated to AIDS research go to the overdeveloped world, even though 80 per cent of people with AIDS live in underdeveloped nations.

In 1992, these figures and the lives they represent led Gates to call for the delay of the release of any new vaccine or cure for AIDS until it was made affordable, accessible and available worldwide. Gates proposed this action as a model for making the world a more just place.

"We have a choice," he said, "to extend our solidarity or abandon and betray ourselves. You may not accept the course of action I have proposed, but your imagination could supply others." This recognition of our global interdependency was a reminder that fear and ignorance stop

us from recognizing everyone as a person just like ourselves, and as deserving of a full life.

In *The Legacy of Jon Gates*, B.C. filmmakers Harvey McKinnon and Peter Davis offer a portrait of the committed gay activist, trade unionist, NDP organizer and human rights activist. The directors focus the film on Gates' clarion call for solidarity, action and sacrifice from the overdeveloped nations.

The documentary follows the activist in the year prior to his death in 1992 at age 37, and ends with his return to Vancouver to say good-bye to friends. At this time, he had lost the use of his liver, and his skin had turned a deep brown.

Legacy is an engaging and accessible film with two drawbacks. For one thing, I wanted to hear more about what led Gates to make his challenge than the 52-minute feature chose to offer. As well, the film's educational concerns, which frustrated my personal and emotional investment, didn't fully come across at times.

To be fair, I must admit that these criticisms arise in part from my having known Jon. I met him shortly after the days in which he was student president at UBC, part of a slate known as "the forces of goodness and light." Watching this documentary as just a film was difficult: here was a chance to listen to someone whom I deeply respect, and with whom I had not spoken for many years.

Sadly, the film only just begins to introduce us to Jon, not through any fault of the filmmakers, but because of the nature of film and time. For me, *Legacy* drove home just how disparate film and flesh are. Nevertheless, the film is powerful in making us recognize that a political choice is ultimately an ethical decision. And this is the Jon I remember: a man committed to solidarity, community-based decision-making, and coalition-building.

My frustration with the film's educational concerns was partly the result of its discussion of AIDS issues in the 'de-

The film makes us recognize that a political choice is ultimately an ethical decision.

veloping nations.' Africa remains a distant and abstract concept in the film, and I yearned for a more informative level of discussion. However, the basic elements of the global scenario that Gates had developed in his research are present in the film, sketched out from clips of his speeches and interviews.

In one of these speeches, Gates stresses the enormity of the AIDS pandemic worldwide. As an example, he offers sub-Saharan African countries in which infection rates are 10 to 20 per cent, compared to Canada where the



Gates called for the delay of any new AIDS cure until it was made available worldwide.

worst case scenario places the infection rate at one-fifth of one per cent.

Gates points out that, globally, AIDS is a heterosexual disease and by the end of the decade women will be

make up 60 per cent of all cases. He reminds us that women are the primary food producers in most developing nations, and make up two thirds of the world's labour force. The devastation the condition has caused and will cause goes beyond individuals or even families.

Armed with this kind of information, Gates dismantles the argument that charity begins at home, and challenges 'us and them' distinctions – because we are all in it together. By the end of this decade, 40 million people will be infected with HIV. Ten million will have AIDS. Currently, someone is infected with HIV every 17 seconds.

Although *Legacy* is a tribute to a man of tremendous energy and generous spirit, the film's most important message is that Gates' life was no more valuable than that of each of the 14 million people currently infected with the virus.

This reminder comes as a moment of brutal and painful honesty in which the tragedy of AIDS – characterized by cultural critic Simon Watney as lying "in the very fact of [its] frequency" – becomes all too clear.

KEN ANDERLINI is an independent Vancouver filmmaker.

SEEING

In future issues, watch for *Our Town*. Vancouver artist Xero gives us her skewed view of a skewed province. This issue: B.C.'s not unproblematic relationship with nature, p. 39.



WATCHING

Inside the BCGEU's *Fight for Survival* is an intriguing view of the province's last decade as experienced by the leaders of its largest union. Directed by Laszlo Barna, the video documents the union's recovery from the shattering blows of Bill Bennett's restraint program to its role in the election of Mike Harcourt. The message: Harcourt deserves a second term. Copies can be ordered from Soren Bech, BCGEU, 4911 Canada Way, Burnaby, V5G 3W3.