

active in public affairs, more closely associated with government and industry, more publicity-conscious. But the fear of communism and government interference is still with us. Scientists are more deeply divided than ever, with dedicated spokesmen on both sides of crucial issues — for and against nuclear disarmament, research on Star Wars, the international exchange of the results of basic research.

Kuznick's book documents a crucial period in the history of science. I wish it had been more carefully edited, however. A number of important individuals are inadequately identified or not identified at all. Also, the journal in which this review appears is mistakenly referred to as the "official organ" of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. *Nature*, needless to stress, is notably independent. Kuznick assumes an above-the-battle stance. He has virtually nothing to say about the present-day implications of his study, presumably on the grounds of letting the facts speak for themselves (a cop-out, because they never do). As far as the future is concerned, however, any serious analysis of science in our times will draw heavily on the record abundantly documented in *Beyond the Laboratory*. □

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## Epidemic story

Peter Newmark

**And the Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic.** By Randy Shilts. *St Martin's Press, New York/Viking-Penguin, London: 1987-1988. Pp. 630. Hbk \$24.95, £15.95; pbk £8.95.*

PUBLISHED late last year with a good deal of success in the United States, *And the Band Played On* is now available in Britain, where AIDS — the subject of the book — will never become either the medical or the political problem that it has been in San Francisco, whence, in a sense, this book emerges.

Because of its very large homosexual community, San Francisco was one of the two US cities where AIDS first took hold. As the AIDS reporter of the *San Francisco Chronicle* since 1982, Randy Shilts, author of the book, is able exhaustively, and sometimes exhaustingly, to recount the agonizing dilemmas the disease posed for the city's homosexual community and politicians — groups that were by no means mutually exclusive.

For the homosexual community the dilemma centred on the bathhouses, where years of repression were vented in excessive and chillingly anonymous homosexual acts. Although it became increasingly evident that the bathhouses were a major cause of the spread of AIDS, the curtailment of these symbols of hard-won homosexual freedom was unthinkable to the less responsible segments of the community. For the politicians the dilemma was much more mundane: enforced closure of the bathhouses would have endangered their support from a community that had gained considerable political muscle.

While Shilts reserves some of his most bitter comments for those who refused to take action in San Francisco, his sword sweeps over a broader battleground. In what sometimes strikes a self-congratulatory tone, he condemns the rest of the nation's media for ignoring AIDS until it killed Rock Hudson and then began seriously to spread outside homosexual communities. There is clearly some force to this analysis. But it is surely naive of a newspaperman, of all people, to suggest that it was simply because homosexual matters were deemed to be irrelevant to readers that the slowly emerging AIDS epidemic at first received far less media coverage than the the 1976 outbreak of Legionnaire's disease. The difference is that 29 deaths in short order are 'news', while sporadic deaths are not.

Another target for Shilts is the directors of blood banks. On the evidence he provides, there is little doubt that they were far too slow to take steps, before the

availability of antibody tests, to prevent blood being drawn from high-risk individuals — a mistake that is still costing lives. In addition he condemns federal agencies for not providing sufficient money at an early enough stage for AIDS research, and for covering up internal recognition of this shortfall — claims that are supported by material obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

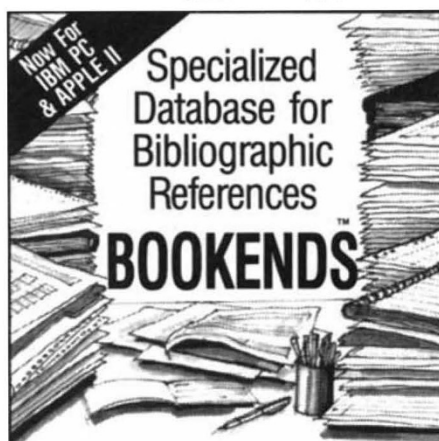
Less convincingly, Shilts attacks the medical establishment for being slow to investigate AIDS therapy. Take the case of HPA-23, the drug that took Rock Hudson to Paris, from where he returned close to death but in a blaze of publicity. It is hardly surprising that desperate AIDS patients would take the expensive trip to Paris in pursuit of a drug that, on anecdotal evidence, offered some hope. But it is equally unsurprising and, indeed, reassuring that the medical establishment would hold to its view that there is simply no substitute for the time-consuming procedure of a rigorous clinical trial to determine whether a drug is better than useless. After all, HPA-23, like a score of other drugs that have been rumoured to cure AIDS, saved no lives.

US scientists are the final target. It is a pity that on the first of rather few occasions on which Shilts dips his toe into scientific waters he makes a fool of himself: "... he had started culturing lymphocytes ... in a special cell line Gallo had developed called interleukin-II". But science is essentially peripheral to the main focus of attack. With a good deal of justification, Shilts claims that US scientists were too slow to recognize the discovery at the Pasteur Institute of the virus that causes AIDS, and then too concerned with their own stake in matters for the good of the swiftest possible progress of the research.

Events in the book are recounted chronologically. In unabashed journalistic style, the author interleaves his account of the politics of AIDS with progressive details of a clutch of individuals involved in one way or another in the unfolding story. Many are San Franciscan homosexuals, whose almost inevitable infection with the AIDS virus and progression to disease and, in several cases, death is a poignant reminder of the consequences of the combination of inertia, indecision and inexcusable delay that characterized the city's response to the epidemic.

The book is at its best when dealing with events in San Francisco, the eye of the storm. Distant events viewed through the storm clouds become distorted and are sometimes superficially treated. But the book deserves a wide reading outside the United States where it may still not be too late to prevent some of the same mistakes being made again.

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