

Toughens laws on violent crime

Byrne signs penal code

By Mark Jaffe
The Record Trenton Bureau

TRENTON — Protesters sang "The Lord's Prayer", and prayed for Brendan Byrne's deliverance in the halls of the State House yesterday as the governor signed a new penal code into law.

A coalition of religious and right-to-life groups had come to the capital to oppose the code's repeal of sanctions against abortion and sex acts between consenting adults.

"Homosexuals need deliverance, fornicators need deliverance, and state government needs deliverance," blared a loudspeaker in front of the State House.

But hymns and prayers did not dissuade the governor from penning his name to the bill. It had taken 10 years to get the penal reforms through the legislature, and the code had been a top priority of the Byrne administration.

The penal code includes tough sentencing procedures that will increase jail sentences for violent crimes. It also toughens the laws against rape.

But it decriminalizes a host of activities ranging from Saturday night poker games to sodomy.

"If more people are going to go to jail for offenses against persons and stay longer for offenses that affect the safety of the people... then so be it," Byrne said as he signed the bill.

"If we have to build more prisons to hold these, then I say let's build more prisons."

The more than 100 judicial, law enforcement, and legislative officials who attended the signing in the Assembly chamber burst into applause as Byrne signed the bill.

But when the governor emerged from the chamber he faced a gantlet of about 80 singing, placard-waving protesters.

Surrounded by state troopers, Byrne strolled down the hall to his office while the ad hoc choir sang "America the Beautiful."

A small group from the Women's Resource and Survival Center, a private agency, did cheer enthusiastically, but they were drowned out by the singers.

In his office, Byrne said the administration would push for an omnibus bill to correct some oversights in the new penal code.

Laws prohibiting ticket scalping and

polluting, which were repealed, would be reinstated, he said.

Whether the "blue laws," which required stores to be closed Sundays, are to be reinstated "will be up to the legislature," Byrne said.

As for the demonstrators, Byrne called them "democracy in action." He added, "They were nice. They sang nice songs."

Passaic County Prosecutor Burrell Ives Humphreys said he originally opposed the bill because he thought it did not contain sufficient protection for the public and would overburden law enforcement officials.

"In the past six months the bill has been considerably tightened," he said. "There are some parts I still would like to see revised, but on balance, I think it's a good bill."

State Police Superintendent Clinton L. Pagano said the code's two most important aspects were the elimination of out-moded crimes and new guidelines for courts.

"The system now for years has labored under the inclusion of an individual's acts that are not criminal, like detaining homing pigeons," Pagano said.

NJ-PENAL CODE

Protesters 'preach' against the revision

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By STUART MARQUES

It had all the trappings of a revival meeting.

A young woman pushed her 18-month-old daughter in a stroller, elderly women waved signs predicting doom, a couple walked arm-in-arm in the hot sun carrying a sign and two men took turns mounting a small platform to preach.

There were about 70 of them in all, "Christians," antiabortionists, antihomosexuals and men and women opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment.

They came to sing hymns and walk in front of the State House to protest against the new criminal code, which Gov. Brendan Byrne signed into law inside the gold-domed building.

They were not against parts of the code that toughen rape laws, increase penalties for white-collar crime and set stringent jail terms for all crimes.

What they didn't like were the parts that decriminalize adultery and homosexual acts, allow towns to establish "combat zones" where pornography is legal and repel abortion laws.

Many of them were among the smaller group of demonstrators that called lawmakers "perverts" and "Sodomites," when the Senate approved the code last month. The code doesn't take effect until Sept. 1 of next year.

"We're Christians and we have to

uplift other Christians," Heath said, while unemployed Woodbridge construction worker Gary Lyszozasz preached to the circling crowd. "We oppose the legislation of sin, and that's what this is," Lyszozasz, 24, told the crowd they represented the majority of people who oppose pornography. "Nobody wants a porno shop across from his home," he said. "The only people who want them are organized crime guys and people you don't want around."

The demonstrators erupted in applause them, waving signs that said "The penal code is a crime," "Veto porno," "Keep sex clean" and "Garden State or Gutter State?"

At times they chanted "Shame on Byrne," but they changed that to "Pray for Byrne" as the 90-minute demonstration wore on.

Edison-school teacher Judy Litwornia, 30, pushed her 18-month-old daughter, Lara, in a stroller and explained that she was opposed to the so-called combat zones provision.

"We don't want them in New Jersey and we don't need them in New Jersey," she said. "I'm a teacher and I'm concerned about children. I'd like to see our laws reflect the feelings of the people."

Kathy Denk, a vice president of Woodbridge Right to Life, didn't like the abortion repealer, though she noted some abortion rules are likely to be reinstated. "When you repeal laws

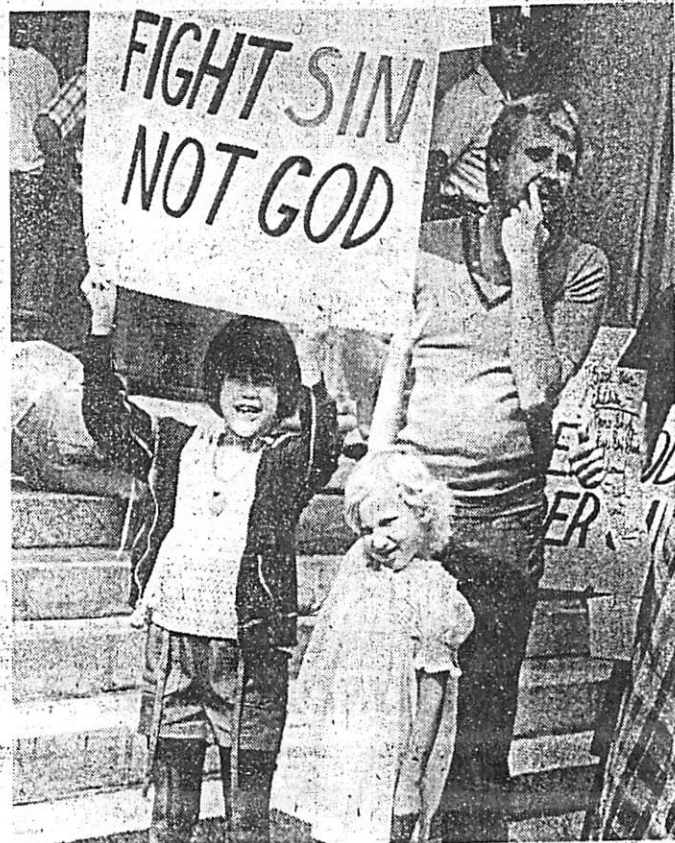


Photo by Edward N. Stiso

Demonstrating in front of the State Capitol to protest Gov. Brendan Byrne's signing of the penal code are, from left, Michele Siregar, 8, of Linden and Dana Litwornia, 4, of Edison

stators, who were not allowed into the Assembly Chamber where Byrne signed the code, jammed the hall outside the Governor's office after the signing.

When it was all over, after Byrne and others went to his office for picture-taking ceremonies, the demonstrators went back outside for