

Beyond the Convergence



photos from protests in Montreal (left), Toronto (centre) and Ottawa (right) by Steph Law, Jackson Chiu and Ariel Troster

BY BLANDINE JUCHS AND ALESSANDRA RENZI

TORONTO—A Montreal father sat in a Toronto courtroom for hours last Tuesday. He had driven all night and was waiting for his daughter to be released. Around 11pm she came out, saying “you can’t imagine what they did to us”. He went inside the court police station to yell his outrage at the officers.

Several shifts have taken place in the past days. The government’s justifications for the security measures has changed as more embarrassing images have flooded the mainstream media. People have begun to ask questions about why some take to the streets to protest global policies that oppress poorer and disadvantaged communities. Many are also processing the emotions of rage, fear, anger and excitement.

On July 1st, crowds took to the streets across Canada, astonished that their rights had been so easily taken away. “The windows of banks and corporations will be

replaced in a few days, but what about our rights?” asked one of the speakers at the Toronto solidarity march. Peer-to-peer support groups and healing circles have begun to spring up, local clinics are offering free treatments, collective defense committees are getting together, lawsuits have been launched against the police, political campaigns are getting organized and networks are expanded. Communities seem ready to take care of each other, opening up spaces in meetings to talk about individual and collective feelings.

In an editorial, the anti-capitalist convergence from Montreal declared: “We conceive of counter-summit demonstrations as a means rather than an end in itself, an opportunity for mobilization and contestation, as well as for meeting and convergence points where we can unite our forces, practices and knowledge.” While addressing the repression and brutality of the past week, communities are sharing stories, analyses and plans, processing intense emotions and harnessing the energy now circulating into links among individuals and groups.

QuAIA Brings Politics Back to Pride

BY MEGAN KINCH

TORONTO—Today, proudly marching in the pride parade is Queers Against Israeli Apartheid. QuAIA fought a hard battle against censorship to bring the politics back into Pride, which became a battle of the grassroots against corporate control of the parade. For example, yesterday’s “Take Back the Dyke” march, organized in response to censorship of QuAIA, went ahead even after Pride Toronto reversed their decision, citing “barricades, marching fees, corporate sponsorship and vetting of groups” as harming the “true sense of community spirit and visibility” of official Pride-sponsored events.

Robynski, a member of QuAIA, spoke about why it was important to support the Palestinian people: “Palestinian queers suffer under the occupation, it’s a military occupation and that exacerbates poverty and all kinds of oppression, against women, against gays. Islam may not understand homosexuality and may not understand queers, but it’s not necessary to understand your allies to fight with them.”

He evoked the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s, where Toronto queers fought in solidarity with Simon Nkoli, an HIV positive

South African man who brought gay rights into the movement of Nelson Mandela and the ANC. Nkoli’s work, and the international solidarity of gay activists against apartheid, was instrumental in making South Africa’s constitution the first to enshrine rights for gays and lesbians.

Speaking personally, Robynski said “Queers have very short memories. It was only a mere 20 or 30 years ago that cops were beating up queers and doing things like washroom entrapment—forcing them to have sex with them and then beating them up—driving

them out to Cherry Beach and beating the shit out of them there. They have been seduced into believing now that the cops are all our friends because there are gay cops and they forget that they can be just as authoritarian as straight cops, cops are always opposed to gay rights, whatever rights they accord us as queers have come kicking and screaming on our part. The current generation hasn’t been told these stories.”

However, the struggle over re-politicizing pride is getting some younger people interested in Palestine solidarity.

Michael Bailey said: “Before this ban I wasn’t following Queers Against Israeli Apartheid but now that they tried to ban it I’m really pissed off.” Morgan Page, also a younger community activist, said “Pride’s history is a political history: it’s a political movement and depoliticizing it is pretty much the worst thing we could ever do. I also think that depoliticizing Pride goes hand in hand with the marginalization of people of colour and trans people and sex workers which are the ones who started the Pride movement at Stonewall.”

PHOTO BY NEAL JENNINGS



Queers demand police accountability



BY LISA WALTER

TORONTO—They gathered outside the 519 Church Street Community Centre with little notice: sixty members of the queer community determined to voice concerns about acts of homophobic violence committed by police during the G20 summit in Toronto. Via the Pride Toronto website, members of the public were invited to the 519 to join police representatives at the “Board and Chief’s Pride Reception.” Toronto Police Services Board

Chair Alok Mukherjee and Chief William Blair were expected at the affair, as well as Councillor Kyle Rae, Pride Toronto Executive Director Tracey Sandilands, and other dignitaries.

Members of the community assured Executive Director Maura Lawless that their intention was to ask questions to the police, and were assured that the event was open to all. Following a few brief speeches, however, community members who tried to enter the centre found themselves barred by police of-

ficers, who said only five people would be allowed to enter at a time. When the crowd reacted with predictable consternation, officers then declared that no one would be allowed to enter. Chief Blair had not yet arrived at the centre.

A noisy standoff ensued. The crowd declared that they would not allow Chief Blair to enter without first addressing their questions. Several individuals who, singly, had succeeded in entering the reception were ejected.

Ms. Sandilands made an appearance to assert that the Chief’s reception was and would continue to be a “signature” affiliated event with Pride. Demonstrators denounced the legitimacy given to the police by association with Pride as “pinkwashing.” Ms. Lawless offered to organize a meeting between community members and the police to address concerns of police brutality; however, this was not embraced by those expecting to attend the reception.

Chief Blair arrived at the community centre close to 6 p.m. and was warmly

greeted by people calling for his resignation. The assembled community members attempted to prevent his entry into the community centre and were rebuffed by a number of police officers. Demonstrators then entered the community centre through a side door, and continued to chant loudly in an attempt to disrupt the proceedings, enthusiastically crying, “No justice, no peace, no homophobic police!” and “Hey hey, ho ho, Bill Blair has got to go!”

Jenny Peto, in a prepared speech, condemned Pride Toronto’s association with Toronto Police on the eve of the community’s signature event, following the largest mass arrest in Canadian history the weekend prior.

After Chief Blair’s departure, which was facilitated by a dozen uniformed and plainclothes officers, community members dispersed while declaring their ongoing support for police accountability to the community.

PHOTOS BY SONIA DOYLE

Pride in Numbers

BY GWALGEN GEORDIE DENT

20,000+
demonstrators last weekend

20
years of ‘Austerity Budgets’ planned

2
words nearly banned
by Pride Toronto in 2010

1000+
arrests last weekend

1st
rank of largest arrests in
Canadian history

300+
Arrests in ‘81 bathhouse raids

2
Dyke Marches in 2010

751
Queers Against Israeli Apartheid
Facebook group members

2009
Trans March inaugural year

Stonewall Was a Riot Too

Tracing the politics of queer repression from Stonewall to the Toronto G20 Summit

BY JUSTIN SAUNDERS AND BRETT STORY

TORONTO—With well over one billion dollars spent on new and lasting policing infrastructure, the largest police presence in Canada’s history and more people arrested and detained than during the October Crisis of 1970, the decision to hold the G20 in the downtown core of Toronto has had far-reaching social effects – effects mirrored in the historical experiences of the queer community.

Certainly, the experiences of both queer and non-queer identified people swept up in the large scale police brutality testify to a pervasive culture of homophobia, sexual discrimination and intimidation, displayed by the police forces tasked with “securing” the G20 leaders last weekend.

Lisa Walter, a journalist with the Alternative Media Centre and writer for Our Times, describes being questioned over whether she was a man, called a “fucking dyke” by the sergeant and segregated with other arrestees on the basis of sexual identity. Ryan Mitchell, working with the medic team, describes the homophobia he experienced during his arrest in these terms: “The arresting officer

then said to both me and the Montrealer that “One of those ni..... big black guys would anally penetrate us and then we could make a gay porno out of it.” He then looked at me and said that I would really like that.”

Such narratives bear a striking resemblance to the experiences of many queers, which prompted the Stonewall Riots of 1969. The police repression of that era is well worth revisiting for the light it sheds on our state’s more recent displays of systematic discrimination. Indeed, 40 years ago, attempts exercised by police to silence queer community organizers resonate deeply with those we’ve just born witness to: arbitrary detention and arrest, raids on our spaces, surveillance, infiltration and threats of violence on the basis of identity. Michael Fader described Stonewall in these terms: “We all had a collective feeling like we’d had enough of this kind of shit.... There was something in the air, freedom a long time overdue, and we’re going to fight for it.”

Reflecting on Stonewall gives us occasion to recognize the importance not only of unearthing and denouncing individual



experiences of brutality and discrimination, but of considering in broader and more political terms the historical relationships between these patterns of systematic police targeting as they’ve been exercised on a cross-section of groups at the forefront of social movements. During Stonewall, and subsequently in Canada during the bathhouse raids, police were also doing more than just acting as homophobic thugs. They were implementing social policies explicitly designed to repress and disempower social movements recognized as a political threat.

At the same time as police were using hateful epithets and threats of sexual violence against arrestees, G20 leaders were passing draconian austerity measures aimed at dismantling and rolling back hard-fought public infrastructure and

social welfare provisions. The success of those austerity measures is surely predicated on the complacency of populations who bear the brunt of their most anti-human and undemocratic effects. The queer rights movement has always acted as a bulwark against such complacency. That’s what makes it dangerous.

Although queer people in our society have made enormous gains, many both within and allied with the community continue to face the systemic violence and discrimination embodied in the policies of many of the g8/g20 countries. What we saw in the streets of Toronto during the g20 was an attempt to divide and conquer communities that need to be unified. That is the purpose of the practice we just witnessed.

PHOTO BY NICOLAI GRUT