

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7534>



Sexual Politics

No return to 'normal' LGBT politics!

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV565 - February 2022 -

Publication date: Thursday 24 February 2022

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

We need a reorientation of LGBT politics that understands radical queer and trans liberation as part of overall vision of social and racial justice.

We are hearing about the need to return to so-called 'normal' politics after the pandemic is over (if it ever ends). And now major governments and official agencies are declaring that COVID will become endemic and that we have to learn to live with it. They are calling for a return to normal long before the crisis ends. This is because capitalists need to continue to make profit and exploit people's labour in spite of the continuing ravages of the pandemic.

There is increasing evidence that aside from the 5,833,777 global death toll to date (35,474 in Canada), tens of millions are being left disabled with long COVID. During this crisis many of us have been deemed expendable (this also happened early in the AIDS crisis): those in the Global South, the elderly and disabled, the unhoused, and Black, Indigenous and racialized people, among others.

In the arena of LGBT+ organizing there is also advocacy for a return to 'normal' politics. This is the case with mainstream largely white LGBT groups such as Egale, a major 2SLGBTQI (Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersexed) rights organization, and the LGBT Purge Fund (that came out of the class action settlement for the purge campaigns in the public service and military), which have both received major federal funding. It is also true of various large-city Pride committees (which also receive funding from Canadian Heritage and Public Safety). These mainstream LGBT groups are longing for a return to the kind of LGBT+ rights agenda they promoted prior to the pandemic, without the complications of the anti-racism and anti-colonialism that have come to the fore in the last few years. This agenda includes many worthy objectives including:

- Ending conversion therapy aimed at changing the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of LGBT people (it took the federal government years to come through with a ban since it was never a high priority);
- Ending the blood ban, which mainstream groups have prematurely declared victory on and thanked the federal government and Canadian Blood Services despite anti-Black racism and a planned focus on anal intercourse that remains discriminatory;
- Getting institutions to fly Pride (rainbow) flags;
- Demanding regularized state funding for largely service-oriented LGBT groups;
- Continuing with memorialization and other projects financed through funding for the 2017 apology for the purge campaign (this is organized through the LGBT Purge Fund and Egale);
- Calling for the Canadian state to intervene in other countries, especially in the Global South and Eastern Europe, to advocate for formal LGBT rights (which can cause major problems given Canadian homonationalism, which views Canada and the countries of the Global North as more enlightened with respect to LGBT rights).

These are objectives that warrant support, but what is absent from the agenda are efforts to address racism, white supremacy and colonialism. It largely echoes the white oriented approach to LGBT+ rights taken by these groups prior to the pandemic, which focuses on formal human rights that can be won using the Charter. By abstracting queer and trans experiences from relations of class, race and colonialism it constructs queer and trans issues as white and middle class in character. They view the pandemic as some sort of natural disaster that can be quickly forgotten about rather than a condensation of numerous social relations as in the AIDS crisis. But this also means returning to a point prior to the mass struggles that were waged during the pandemic, including the global uprising against anti-Black racism and police violence in 2020 and the 2021 No Pride in Genocide protests against Canada's genocidal practices at residential schools that were associated with a number of Indigenous landback struggles and support for the Wet'suwet'en against Coastal Gaslink and the RCMP.

No return to 'normal' LGBT politics!

It is as if queer and trans politics are to learn nothing from our profound experiences during the pandemic, or from the global uprising, or from "No Pride in Genocide" organizing. These experiences are to be quickly forgotten—as part of a broader social organization of forgetting of our histories of resistance in these neoliberal and homonationalist times—so that 'we' can return to a largely white, middle class, neoliberal agenda of integrating a layer of queers (and, to a lesser extent, trans people) into social 'normality.' This can be summarized as a neoliberal queer perspective, one which regards integration into racial capitalist social and state relations as the only road to progress on LGBT+ issues. This not only obscures the everyday violence of racial capitalist patriarchal relations prior to the pandemic but also all those who were excluded on the grounds of race and class from the very rights revolution to which these groups want us to return.

This ignores what we have learned from surviving the pandemic about the need to end vaccine apartheid and transfer resources to people in the Global South, about the power of the pharmaceutical corporations, and the relegating of so many of us into expendable groups. This has also meant a refusal to learn from AIDS activism when addressing this pandemic since it raises too many radical (getting to the root of the problem) questions about the importance of health-care for all and about public health (which public and whose health is being protected?), about why and how people are designated as expendable, and about the power and profits of pharmaceutical companies, and about the need for direct action organizing. In the context of the pandemic, we should be recasting the AIDS activist slogan Silence=Death! as Capitalism=Death!.

Mainstream LGBT+ groups wish not only to have us forget all this but also to ignore the impact of the global uprising on queer and trans organizing that led many queer and trans activists to focus more on anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and to call for the defunding and abolition of the police as an institution. This perspective already resonated in the queer and trans community but grew stronger among Black, Indigenous and racialized activists and increasingly gained traction among some white activists. Even Pride Toronto in 2021 called for a 50 percent reduction in the Toronto Police budget, despite reverting back to plans for assisting in police training and working with the police on "harm reduction" shortly thereafter.

This anti-racist focus led some white middle class leaders to feel like they were being eclipsed. The roots of this attitude lay in a view of Black Lives Matter and other Black liberation activists as somehow being outside 'our' movement, which was coded as white. The departure from the 'normal' white middle class agenda and the centering by some activists of Black, Indigenous and racialized queer and trans people, along with broader commitments to challenge racism and colonialism, made them feel displaced. Now they want to return to centre stage. Organizing around the theme No Pride in Genocide also challenged attempts by white dominated mainstream groups like Egale to identify LGBT rights as deriving solely from the Charter and the Canadian state and to use Two-Spirit people as a cultural minority (or early forerunner of white LGBT people) which can somehow be separated from the history and current genocidal practices of the Canadian state and settler colonialism.

One material basis for this return to the politics as usual is state funding and how this ties organizations like Egale, the LGBT Purge Fund, and larger Pride Committees, to state institutions and shifts the focus of their accountability away from queer and trans communities. It imposes corporate forms of organizing with executive directors, boards of directors, and a passive membership as well as increasing dependence on corporate funding. These state funding regulations seek to socially re-organize racial class relations within our communities to favour police participation. They celebrate the myth that the 1969 criminal code reform decriminalized homosexuality; and more generally they come to support homonationalism and neoliberalism. This regulatory process gives these groups far more financial power than more community-based groups. This is also part of how the long struggle for an apology from below for the purge campaign was transformed into an apology from above as new institutional sites for the hegemony of the neoliberal queer were established through legal and funding agreements. This funding, and the organizational infrastructures it creates, represents an accommodation with neoliberalism of major sections of our communities. The other side of this coin is the further marginalization of Black, Indigenous and racialized people, sex workers, the poor, and the unhoused, as well as the rejection of more radical approaches.

No return to 'normal' LGBT politics!

Learning from the pandemic, the global uprising, and "No Pride in Genocide"

However, many of us learned a great deal from the pandemic and the mobilizations of 2020 and 2021 about how we need to centre the experiences and needs of Black, Indigenous and racialized queer and trans people in our organizing. It follows that addressing racism and supporting demands to defund/abolish the police become central to queer and trans organizing. Many of us took up and began to develop queer and trans liberation abolitionist agendas, which are very different from previous rights-based approaches. We were no longer interested in single issue LGBT organizing, which was always based on separating our struggles from race, colonial, class, and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

We cannot allow these important experiences to be forgotten with a return to 'normal' white middle class queer and trans politics which identifies with and seeks acceptance from the Canadian state and views the Charter as the road to rights and freedom. A return to politics as usual means facilitating the ways in which gains in the area of rights benefit some far more than others, expanding the powers of white middle class (mostly cis) men. Consider that Egale partnered with Toronto Police Services and other groups in 2021 to do inclusion training for police forces in Ukraine. This is the very same Toronto Police Services that is barred from participating in the Pride Toronto parade and festival.

A radical re-orientation of queer and trans organizing is in order, one that understands radical queer and trans liberation as part of an overall vision of social and racial justice.

We need to take leadership and direction from Black, Indigenous and racialized queer and trans people and espouse an approach that views different oppressions as interconnected and mediated, placing the needs of those left out of the rights revolution at the centre.

Source: [Canadian Dimension](#)

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of this article for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.