June 23, 2021 |

Statements

Pride as Protest

As Pride month wraps up, it is appropriate to reflect on its origins, which are deeply steeped in protest. Pride was led largely by queer and Trans people of colour against police brutality enacted on community members. This year marks fifty-five years since the beginning of the Pride protest movement.

Nowadays Pride may appear as a celebration of diversity, one that is sometimes co-opted by elements that were once the very target of protests. The BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) recognizes and acknowledges that Pride began as a protest and remains so in the hearts and minds of many.

The Pride celebrations that we have become accustomed to--with huge floats, rainbows, sparkly dancers, candy and brand logos-- have not happened this year, as we strive to guard our communities against further spread of COVID-19. Instead, we are commemorating online and with our loved ones, and honour the memory of the origins of the movement we have come to know as Pride.

One of the first moments that sparked the Pride marches was when management called the police at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966, where Trans women and drag queens were gathered. One of the women threw coffee in the face of one of the offending officers trying to detain her, and this sparked a multiple night protest at the diner.

In 1967, the brutal police raid at the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles on New Years' saw the arrest of fourteen people. The tavern was targeted as a known hangout for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, especially trans people of colour, and hundreds of people responded by gathering to protest peacefully on February 11, 1967 against "police lawlessness".

And of course, one of the most pivotal moments of the movement was the Stonewall riots in the summer of 1969 in New York City. These riots lasted multiple days and were led by Black and Brown Trans and Queer community members against police brutality and political bigotry.

In 1970, the first Pride marches began, and slowly, and surely, over the years have spread to become a fixture of community life in so many of our communities worldwide. As the Pride movement has grown in popularity, so has the corporate and political interest in Pride, and the exploitation of the movement by these interests to improve their image, while simultaneously distracting us from the original meaning of the movement.

In a Canadian context, in 1981 Black and Brown and Trans communities led protests against police brutality in response to violent bath house raids by police in Toronto. The movement in Canada grew quickly and shone a spotlight on police brutality against Black and Brown and Indigenous communities.

For 2021, the BC Federation of Labour recognizes the origins of Pride. We've stepped back to make space for the ones who carry Pride forward as a protest. We honour the Black and Brown Queer and Trans community members who started it, and we celebrate the human rights progress that has been made so far. We invite the rest of the labour movement in BC to join us as we commit to continue to supporting Pride in all its expressions, including as a protest movement.