

by: Lump

Eugene commemorated Pride last month with a variety of events throughout June. I attended two of these on the 28th, the march to Eugene Pride in the morning and Pride Was a Riot! in the afternoon. This report back will loosely cover what I experienced at each event and some reflections pertaining to Pride in Eugene.

The March

Kesey Square is filled with people. Official speeches compete with megaphoned street preachers bloviating on the sinfulness of we, the queers. The atmosphere is chaotic yet muted. The noise has all combined into a dull patois lacking ears to inspire. The heat of the morning is finally interrupted by the marching band coming into formation. A drumline is, as always, a joy to encounter. My hopes of disruption by a Palestine Contingent that have lured me to the event are waning. Three separate groups in three distinct official vests watched as the march took shape behind the now advancing band. The march is on, it's route protected by EPD officers who have been instructed this obstruction of a public way is not a threat. Not that I could disagree. The march passes an applauding Saturday Market and proceeds up 8th. Signs, banners, and flags decorate the crowd as a member of PSL leads chants. At "Down, down, co-optation! Up, up, liberation!", I balk.1 2 3 4 5 6 7 A group of young folk with a Queer Intifada banner raise my spirits but it remains galling to hear calls-and-response invoking Stonewall flanked front and back by EPD vehicles and security on each side. The crowd winds its way through neighborhood streets, finally arriving at Lane County Fairgrounds. We pass a ticket booth and I split off from the group, headed home. At least tickets for Eugene Pride were offered on a sliding scale for as low as \$1.

Pride Was a Riot!

Sladden Park is warm and murmurs with casual conversation. An

effigy, perhaps a piñata, in an ICE uniform with a J.D. Vance meme face is resting on a tree. A variety of local orgs and people have set up tables to distro from as well as blankets and chairs for enjoying the shade. Food Not Bombs has Cake Pops! The initial crowd is on the smaller side but who amongst us hasn't spend an afternoon tabling to other tablers? More people arrive and pick through various zines on offer before settling in for a set by locals The Big Scare. Speeches are made connecting struggles for queer liberation to anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Good! A reference to the people's war of Peru leaves me more skeptical. Then someone tells me not to prioritize identity; I need liberation as a worker, not a queer. Speeches go on for a bit and the event wraps up with what was in fact a piñata(!) being smashed, a raffle call, and a DJ set.

Whither Pride?

Some will read "queer" as synonymous with "gay and lesbian" or "LGBT." This reading falls short. While those who would fit within the constructions of "L," "G," "B" or "T" could fall within the discursive limits of queer, queer is not a stable area to inhabit. Queer is not merely another identity that can be tacked onto a list of neat social categories, nor the quantitative sum of our identities. Rather, it is the qualitative position of opposition to presentations of stability – an identity that problematizes the manageable limits of identity. Queer is a territory of tension, defined against the dominant narrative of white hetero monogamous patriarchy, but also by an affinity with all who are marginalized, otherized and oppressed. Queer is the abnormal, the strange, the dangerous. Queer involves our sexuality and our gender, but so much more. It is our desire and fantasies and more still. Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world. Queer is a total rejection of the regime of the Normal.

Mary Nardini Gang, Toward the Queerest Insurrection

I am left feeling that both Pride events lacked precisely that, pride. The long (and ongoing) history of anti-queer violence from police and their co-conspirators^{2 6} puts me firmly in the “no cops at Pride” camp. I am not, nor am I interested in being, queer in a way police want to protect. I have no desire to be accepted or understood by a regime of the Normal. I want attack, not legibility. A day meant to remember police violence against our queer ancestors and celebrate the queer violence they returned is betrayed by capitulation to the Normal. If we cannot be proud enough of our forebearers fighting bigoted cops in the streets to keep them alive in our hearts, I fear we will never have the strength to be proud of ourselves, of our own queerness, either. We should be proud of our antagonism, proud of our negativity. Liberation, like queerness, is a positive project but also one of negation. We aren’t just building a new world in the shell of the old, we’re throwing bricks through the shell and looting the detritus for parts.

Queerness is not something allowed by a regime of liberal tolerance. It is not a spoiled enfant terrible throwing a tantrum at the end of history. Queerness, in its creative desire and its creative destruction, crashes against the limits of liberalism’s attempt to totalize and discipline. It cannot be simply tolerated because it is a desire for things intolerable by a liberal regime. The hollowness of the supposed acceptance of the queer goes beyond the continued existence of reactionary animus and disgust. The inherent instability of the queer is unacceptable to the liberal. Destabilizing categories like family, intimacy, even the human itself, queerness refuses a type of legibility demanded by a normalizing State apparatus. Disrupting and diverting flows of capital, reputation, and desire in ways both unpredictable and untraceable to power is far too threatening to be allowed. Thus a Pride which refuses the visceral authenticity of its own past, present, and future is made to paint over, to bury, queerness. We are offered nostalgia and branding in place of

lives.

For me, a Pride parade should encompass a more genuine and complete celebration of queers, modern and past. Not just a recognition of what victories have been achieved but a celebration of the battles that won those victories. It should be joyous, yes, but I want my ancestors to be with me in that joy. I want to celebrate antagonism and bravery and blood. And I definitely don't want any cops.

This hostility can't be reserved only for exterior threats, though. You don't have to cash a cop check to do cop work. Anti-queerness persists, sometimes even thrives, within our own spaces too. Lateral and internalized bigotry continue to wreak havoc in countless lives and cisheteronormative structures like rape culture plague our movements. These are not merely features of capitalistic exploitation. Patriarchy is a co-conspirator of Capital, not its child. Repression and violence based on gender and sexuality have existed and continue to exist outside of capitalist frameworks. Decentering queerness in liberation can invisibilize the violence done to queers within our own spaces. That's not a front I am willing or able to sacrifice.

Queerness does not emerge from class relations and cannot be reduced to a superstructural relationship. It does not simply emerge from production because it is itself productive. The destabilizing effect of queerness is a result of its productive nature. True, Capital wants to rewrite queer desire to make it legible to its own goals and modes of productive relations. But Capital is not the only form by which power attempts to inscribe regulation and conformity into queer bodies. The defining and disciplining of particular genders, sexualities, and relationships has been happening since long before the enclosure drove people to cities in which proletarian relationships formed. Queer revolt does not stop at Capital because queer production includes more than proletarian relations. Queer liberation entails more than

victory over the bourgeoisie because the destabilizing production of the queer extends to further and more immanent horizons than that. Subtracting queerness from our fields of analysis and struggle both impoverishes the fight against economic exploitation and excuses, even permits, bigoted violence. As the Combahee River Collective wrote:

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation.

We need a queer liberation because only it can or will liberate queerness. I hate cops and bosses, but I hate transphobes and rapists too. I will gladly cheer the fall of the bosses but I want much more than that and am unwilling to compromise. That's what I was celebrating; that more, and the beautiful, brave, and hungry queers who have refused to give up the fight for it. That's what I wish we had all been celebrating.

I am proud to be queer, proud of my queer ancestors, and proud of my queer comrades. I am proud of their queerness and want them to be as well. When offered a choice between a hollow Pride and a dequeered revolution I find both alienating. In both, even when present, I am absent. To attack together, to hold each other, we have to embrace our love for ourselves and each other. Our whole selves. The Combahee River Collective again, "Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work." We must not just take pride, but seize it.

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