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50 years after Stonewall, the struggle for LGBTQ2S liberation continues

written by Andre Powell
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This year marks 50 years since the Stonewall Rebellion. The rebellion was sparked by what would have been another routine raid on a gay bar in New York City. But

the night of June 26, 1969, something different happened. The patrons of this bar — young transgenders, gay men and lesbians, Black, Latinx and white, pushed to the edge by endless police raids on their social gathering places — fought back in four nights of street battles.

This began the organizing of a tremendous movement inspired by the Black Liberation and Women's Liberation movements, and taken note of by Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton in August 1970. The rebellion is marked all over the world with celebrations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit pride.

Our community has made many achievements in beating back the institutional oppression from police and both federal and state governments. There has been a sea change in societal attitudes toward the LGBTQ2S community. Gay men have survived the brutal AIDS health crisis with tremendous support from our lesbian sisters, who themselves were battling their own health crisis with breast cancer.

Our community, however, remains under attack, as the right wing uses us as a rallying point. The attacks against the transgender community by laws and violence have reached alarming proportions.

In New York City, there are two Pride marches scheduled this year. The first is organized by Heritage of Pride, which in the last two decades has become so very commercialized by corporate sponsors and even features an LGBT police contingent. The second is called Reclaiming Pride and is led by more radical elements who opposed the corporate commercialization of the march and remind the community that Stonewall was a rebellion against police brutality.

A history of struggle

Stonewall marked the beginning of the modern LGBTQ2S rights movement. But it

wasn't the first act of resistance.

In May 1897, Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, a German organization specifically dedicated to gay emancipation. The committee's primary focus was the repeal of Paragraph 175, a provision of the German Criminal Code that criminalized homosexual acts between men.

Through its publications, along with public meetings and extensive speaking tours, the committee sought to educate the general public on the issue of homosexuality while encouraging other gay people to join the struggle.

Hirschfeld had amassed a tremendous amount of volumes of work and research on homosexuality over the years. These works were destroyed in the 1930s when Hitler and the Nazis came to power. In the Nazi concentration camps, Hitler exterminated an estimated 250,000 gays. They were forced to wear the pink triangle on their clothing to signify they were gay.

"The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal" was written by author Bob McCubbin and published in 1976, during the earliest years of the modern LGBTQ2S movement. (It was later republished under the title "The Roots of Lesbian and Gay Oppression.") It is the first and decades later remains the definitive historical materialist analysis of the development of LGBTQ2S oppression. This oppression is rooted in the development of class society.

The origin of LGBTQ2S oppression

Pre-class society reaches back many hundreds of thousands of years, when the early human societies were structured on a matrilineal basis and tribal organization centered around mothers and their children. Over time, the development of technology to the level where more material wealth could be produced than was immediately needed for the survival of the tribe brought a fundamental change in

human relations.

It was on the basis of this surplus accumulation of material wealth that classes arose. Due to changes in material conditions, men at the top of the new societal hierarchy replaced the egalitarianism of communal society. The struggle against the matrilineal organization of society was over the question of the lineage of children. Private property-oriented men wanted their wealth to go to their own children. This guarantee could only come about by the establishment of patrilineal descent.

With this change, emotions and sexual feelings came under harsh social class scrutiny, with stringent sexual prohibitions. Sexuality in general assumed a negative social significance it never had before. Free expression of sexuality was no longer compatible with the new, rigid limits of the male-dominated family structure. This made homosexuality a social and political issue in class society in a way it had never been before.

But when we take a look at societies built on socialist principles, we see that they lay the basis for honoring and respecting the contributions of every individual. So the elimination of LGBTQ2S oppression, I firmly believe, will come about through the elimination of capitalism and its replacement with socialism, a system meant to value people as they are and to meet people's needs.

SLL photo by Greg Butterfield

