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In the spirit of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera: No to police occupation!

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Trans Day of Action in New York June 28.
SLL photo: Greg Butterfield

New York — On June 28, I walked the short distance from my day job in lower Manhattan to Sheridan Square, a historic LGBTQ2S meeting place just south of the Stonewall Inn, where a police raid exactly 50 years before sparked Marsha P. “Pay It No Mind” Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and other super oppressed, working-class, queer youths to rise up against the vicious goons of the New York Police Department.

I had heard about a [wall of honor recently erected at the Stonewall](#). I wanted to see if I could visit it and read the name of my departed comrade and friend, the noted author and fierce communist Leslie Feinberg, who was among those honored there.

I never reached the Stonewall nor saw the wall of honor. Instead, I found the blocks surrounding Stonewall densely packed with NYPD cops, some with truncheons, some in what appeared to be “light” riot gear, nearly all carrying sidearms. Metal barricades closed off streets for many blocks around.

Access to the area was severely restricted. LGBTQ2S people, other workers and area residents were turned away, shunted into long lines or questioned about where they were going. Police vehicles of every description, from scooters to massive mobile command buses, clogged the streets.

The excuse, it seems, was the plan to hold a ticketed, corporate-sponsored, celebrity-attended “celebration” in the area. But the vastness and totality of the police occupation went well above and beyond any reasonable measure, even from the point of view of these bourgeois sponsors

It certainly did evoke Stonewall ‘69, but not in a good way.

Worried much, NYPD, City Hall and Wall Street?

It is just this sort of behavior that inspired many LGBTQ2S activists and allies to found the Reclaim Pride Coalition to organize a Queer Liberation March for Stonewall 50, to counter the corporate/police takeover of the traditional New York

Pride Parade.

Just a few weeks ago, New York Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill got headlines — and drew the scorn of activists — when he issued a mealy-mouthed, 50-years-too-damn-late “apology” for the police raid on Stonewall and subsequent NYPD repression against those who fought back.

Reclaim Pride answered: “We are not impressed by Commissioner O'Neill's empty apology, given under pressure during Pride month. Where has this apology been for the last 50 years? The NYPD Vice Squad is still in business, busting sex workers and others, while its members run their own brothels. The NYPD is still arresting trans kids of color for walking down the street and arrested a transwoman in the Bronx who was walking home from work, holding her in custody for 24 hours, in handcuffs! The NYPD has spent decades entrapping gay men. And the NYPD continues to strike fear in communities of color and other marginalized communities.”

Fortunately, later on the afternoon of June 28, I found an inspiring antidote: the Trans Day of Action rally held in nearby Washington Square Park, followed by a neighborhood march. Hundreds of trans people, their families, friends, co-workers and supporters gathered for this annual event, now in its 15th year, sponsored by the Audre Lorde Project.

Trans and gender nonconforming people of all nationalities, sexualities, abilities and ages came together to mourn the dead and fight for the rights and futures of the living, with a special focus this year on housing justice.

And Stonewall? Even if it is temporarily under occupation, for the folks at Washington Square Park, and for all workers and oppressed peoples — it still means fight back.



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