



People taking part in a Pride Parade in Brussels, Belgium.

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# Queer Climate Justice

by JARA DE HOOG

The world is facing an unprecedented political and ecological tipping point – one that is written in the language of fire, drought, flooding and extreme heat. But it's not just temperature records that are breaking. In the United States, jurisdictions have already passed more anti-2SLGBTQ+ bills in 2023 than in any year previous. And new educational policies in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan indicate that, distressingly, Canada may not be that far behind our neighbours to the South.

And yet, queer liberation and climate justice movements are often highly isolated from one another, fighting for what they believe to be separate causes. Right-wing movements have clearly dispensed with this false separation, attacking queerness and the climate with equal hostility. For example, a Republican congressman mockingly asked “what pronouns forest fires use” as deadly wildfire smoke blanketed the American East Coast earlier this summer. It is becoming increasingly clear that those of us fighting for a loving and abundant world must respond by connecting our own struggles, advancing climate justice and queer liberation simultaneously. Our future depends on it.

So, what connects these two seemingly unrelated movements? To start, we can recognize that gendered oppression and environmental destruction have been historically intertwined. Trying to eradicate the long-standing gender diversity present in many of Turtle Island's Indigenous populations and replace it with strictly binary European gender roles was crucial to the colonizers' quest to destroy Indigenous cultures, steal their land and extract its wealth. Our modern profit-based economy of capitalism arose from this environmental and gendered destruction, and its legacy follows us closely. Whenever cracks in the system become visible, patriarchal leaders consistently scapegoat queer people to distract from how the system is failing us all. It is happening right now in the U.S. and the U.K.: instead of admitting that climate change exposes the fatal flaws in their economic logic, right-wing leaders are doubling down on their threatened petro-masculinity by re-asserting their urge to control and do harm, be it to queer people or the atmosphere.

The queer and climate justice movements are also concretely related because queer people, who are statistically more likely to be economically disadvantaged, are more vulnerable to climate disasters. For example, because of family rejection and employment discrimination, trans people are many times more likely than cisgendered people to be homeless at any given time, and those experiencing homelessness are much more vulnerable to climate threats such as flooding and heat waves.

## TAKE ACTION

If you identify as queer, try going to a climate event and reflect on how included you felt there. If you feel comfortable doing so, offer advice or feedback to organizers. Whoever you are, you can also donate money or time to intersectional organizations such as 350.org, Every One Every Day Halifax or the EAC.

Another connection is that queer liberation and climate justice are both committed to a safe and just future. Although the movements focus on what these concepts each mean to them, the common goal is a world where life in all its diversity is seen as inherently valuable. These common values are an ideal place to start aligning the two movements.

Clearly, the climate justice and queer liberation movements have much to gain from each other's victories. But is there, as some have suggested, a danger that collaboration would just muddy the waters? Organizing history suggests otherwise.

If movements build links according to their shared values and unique perspectives, they can build a whole greater than the sum of its parts. To realize an ideal future, each movement has bold demands, be they to restructure our growth-centred economy or redefine gender and sexuality. These demands need support of communities outside the movement to have any hope of happening. If the movements work to present these demands as unified, rather than separate or competing, they are more likely to garner the large-scale support required to change the world. These demands could be further integrated with those of other movements like feminism and anti-racism to create a movement for the liberation of all, supercharged by the urgent timing of the climate crisis. This type of cross-movement organizing has repeatedly shown its effectiveness in recent history – from the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) alliance working in solidarity with striking coal miners in 1984, to the Black Panthers' work supporting disability rights activists in the 70's, all the way back to collaborative resistance to Nazi occupation during the Second World War. When trying to change the world, solidarity might be the best tool we have.

Queer people also have unique lived experiences to bring to the climate movement. Living as an out queer person, in a society that, at best, struggles to understand us and, at worst, outright villainizes us, takes immense bravery. In the context of climate justice, our thick skin and practiced self-assurance can help us confront powerful political and business interests and keep us going when these interests try to discredit us.

The climate movement also has a unique perspective on intersectionality, or the ways that multiple oppressions overlap, from which parts of the mainstream queer movement could benefit. Liberation for all 2SLGBTQ+ people requires considering those of us who are BIPOC, low-income, disabled or otherwise marginalized by society. These groups are not well-served by close partnership with large corporations, which some advocates of queer rights welcome uncritically. Many of these corporate “allies,” while paying lip service to queer people, actively reinforce other systems of oppression – for example, by financing pipeline projects through Indigenous land. The climate justice movement is familiar with intersectionality, as it (at least in its best form) strategically prioritizes those who experience multiple forms of oppression and are therefore more vulnerable to climate disaster. Building this perspective in parts of the mainstream queer movement where it is currently absent would bring a deeper understanding of how to make the world better for all queer people, not just cis white ones.

It seems clear that the climate justice and queer liberation movements could benefit greatly from closer collaboration. There are many ways that we can make this happen equitably and effectively. Both movements need to devote time and resources to understanding each other's perspectives by sharing knowledge and building lasting presence in each other's movements. They also need to adjust their own practices to be more equitable. The climate movement has been historically unsure about how central queer liberation should be in its cause, but a “queered” climate movement would know that 2SLGBTQ+ communities' pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as housing insecurity, personal trauma and healthcare discrimination, make us especially vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of climate change. It would back up this recognition with time and money for queer mutual aid organizations. Meanwhile, an environmentally informed queer movement would address its complicity in other oppressive systems. This would certainly mean distancing itself from corporations who distract from their destructive activities with superficial support for the queer community. If these movements want to truly stand for all their communities, they should let their most marginalized members lead, but avoid policing who “qualifies” as marginalized enough.

We are all whole human beings, none of our lives defined by a single issue. We are inseparable from our human and non-human communities, which means that no one can be truly free while others are subjugated. As scary as the climate crisis is, it is also an opportunity to demand everything we have previously been too afraid to ask for, since the future depends on it. By working together – not just between the queer liberation and climate justice movements, but between all movements fighting for a better future – we stand the best chance of victory.

We need a world where all life forms, not just the privileged few, are recognized for the gift that they are, and given the support they need. We needed that world yesterday, but, as it is, tomorrow will have to do.

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