



BRIEFING DOCUMENTS

Remember This: A brief statement on Memorializing Resistance to the Canadian War on Queers

By Gary Kinsman

Thousands lost their jobs in the public service, the military and the RCMP, thousands were under national security surveillance, hundreds of careers and lives were destroyed. This included sexual violence against women in the military and some affected people taking their own lives. This was the *Canadian War on Queers*.

This is now well documented despite decades of Liberal and Conservative governments trying to silence those who spoke out on this and to make us forget. This campaign was *no* mistake and was mandated from the highest levels of the Canadian state through Cabinet directives, the Security Panel and other security bodies, and military disciplinary and 'disposal' policies. The Canadian state made LGBT2S+ (from now on summarized as queer) people into 'national security risks' and threw us outside the fabric of the 'nation' denying us our rights. There are major problems with national security as an ideological practice that includes only some within the 'nation' while expelling others. We must always ask which nation and whose security was/is being protected? We forget this question at our peril – and part of what we must remember is the connections with other groups who have been under national security attack, currently including Indigenous and Muslim and Arab identified people, who can also be two-spirit and queer.

I write this as one of the leading researchers/writers on the purge campaigns in Canada including writing with Patrizia Gentile *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (see references at the end); as a founding member of the We Demand An Apology Network in 2015 which pushed for a state apology, redress, and expungement; and as a participant in the Gay and Lesbian Historians Group which protested the limitations of the expungement of unjust criminal code convictions legislation and that was able to get the bawdy house and vagrancy laws finally abolished earlier this year.

While we must refuse to forget these purge campaigns we also need to reflect on *what* and *how* we remember. There are dilemmas of memorialization which can tend to freeze or institutionalize our memory, or can even participate in the social organization of forgetting what took place. The limitations of apologies and memorialization can be seen most clearly in the reality that despite a series of state apologies for the racism, colonialism and genocide committed against Indigenous people, including the violence against missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit people, racist colonizing practices towards Indigenous people continue.

Specifically looking at monuments for the Canadian War on Queers – a monument focused only on the victimization of those purged would be highly misleading. Or one giving legitimacy to the government or state institutions who apologized decades late would be a major distortion. Instead we need a focus on the actual experiences of the purge campaigns and both individual and collective resistance to it. Memorializing this only as victimization or focussing on the Canadian government or military for finally apologizing would be to distort our memories and become part of the social organization of forgetting what actually took place in the Canadian War on Queers.

In the research that Patrizia Gentile and I did the most remarkable discovery was the non-cooperation and resistance of suspected gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and gender diverse people to the national security campaigns. This took place even prior to the emergence of our movements based on early community forms of solidarity and ethics. This non-cooperation forced the RCMP to shift its surveillance strategies since people now refused to give them names and information. People were never simply passive 'victims' and often actively navigated these practices. Gays and lesbians obstructed national security campaigns.

David's story from 1964 in Ottawa describes national security surveillance to identify the men in the bar and resistance to this at the Lord Elgin basement tavern which was a meeting ground for men interested in having sex with other men (including public servants and military men) at that time.

We even knew ... that there was somebody in some police force ... who would be sitting in the bar. And you would see someone with a ... newspaper held right up, and if you ... looked really closely you could find him holding behind the newspaper a camera, and these people were photographing everyone in the bar ... We always knew that when you saw someone with a newspaper held right up in front of their face ... that somebody would take out something like a wallet and do this sort of thing [like snapping a photo] and then ... everyone would then point over to that person And I am sure that the person hiding behind the newspaper knew he had been found out ... (Kinsman and Gentile, 2010, p. 1).

This was part of the non-collaboration with the security police that developed in gay networks in Ottawa in the 1960s, forcing the RCMP to shift strategy. It could no longer rely on gay informants outside the public service to give information on public servants and members of the military. The RCMP was forced to rely on local sex police threatening to lay criminal code charges against people so that they would give up people's names and on the 'fruit machine' detection research to try to find a 'scientific' way to determine people's

sexualities so that they could be denied entry to the public service and military if determined to be 'homosexuals.'

Many of those interrogated refused to give up the names of their friends. Women suspected of being lesbians in the military were forced to endure hours of interrogation by male security officers and being asked intimate, personal questions relating to sexual practices. For some this amounted to a verbal 'sexual assault.' Many refused to break or to implicate others. *This is vital to remember.*

Capacities for resistance expanded with the emergence of our liberation movements in the early 1970s and laid the basis for some who had been purged to come out publicly to speak about their experiences. It is this organizing that eventually leads to the formation of the We Demand an Apology Network, EGALE's *Just Society* report and the class action suit. It is our organizing that creates the basis for the apology process.

There are three parts to the apology process 1) the apology statement 2) the class action suit for redress and 3) the expungement of unjust convictions. Here for space reasons I focus only on two of the limitations of the statement and one aspect of the final settlement in the class action. But there are major limitations in the expungement legislation (see Active History).

Regarding Trudeau's apology statement in Nov. 2017 there is a total neglect of the widespread surveillance of gay and lesbian groups in the 1970s who were defined as a threat to national security for challenging the security practices of the Canadian state. *This must also be remembered.* In its "Points needed in an official, public state apology" (Sept. 14, 2017) the We Demand an Apology Network wrote:

"The RCMP surveillance campaign in the 1970s and early 1980s extended to cover gay and lesbian organizations that challenged state national security policies. This was related to and often part of a broader surveillance campaign directed against the feminist movement, unions, the Quebec sovereignty movement, immigrant and Black activists, Indigenous organizing, the left and others. This included the surveillance of the 1971 "We Demand" demonstration, organizations like the Gay Alliance Towards Equality in Vancouver, a number of cross-country conferences, as well as lesbian dances, lesbians involved in the feminist movement and many others. These organizations themselves were often portrayed as risks to 'national security' simply for challenging discriminatory practices towards lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the public service and military."

This was *not* addressed in the apology statement.

In the only attempt to account for how the purge campaign happened, Trudeau stated: "You see, the thinking of the day was that all non-heterosexual Canadians would automatically be at an increased rate of blackmail by our adversaries..." (PMO, 2017). But the active agency behind the purge campaign was not the "thinking of the day" which implies no real state responsibility for what took place. This was certainly not the thinking of gay, lesbian and other activists in the 1960s and 1970s who challenged such views. Instead this "thinking" was actively put in place by the Canadian state when we were targeted as security risks. This *active state responsibility* must be remembered in any memorialization.

Regarding the final settlement of the class action suit there is a *major* problem regarding remembering which must be based on the release of all the organizing documents used in the security campaigns by Cabinet, the Security Panel and other security bodies, External Affairs, the RCMP, the military, and CSIS. Schedule L of the final settlement leaves documentation relating to government policies entirely up to a Research Project within Library and Archives Canada. The settlement agreement states that they will search likely sources but the government "does not warrant that the Research Project will identify, access and/or release all of Canada's documents relating to the LGBT Purge. Beyond the Research project ... Canada does not assume any further obligation to conduct research to locate non-personal records relating to the LGBT Purge" (Final Settlement Agreement, 2018, p. 176). They also cite the Access to Information Act so that national security exclusions are still in play, meaning that any documents could be redacted on security grounds. Here there is a major contradiction. The government is apologizing for the purge campaigns but is refusing to release all the organizing documents for this campaign. Without the release of all of these documents the social organization of forgetting continues and this stands in the way of remembering what took place.

In conclusion monuments can be a way of remembering and not forgetting but they can also be part of forgetting what actually took place and the social forces behind it. There is a need for memorialization and monuments that focus on the lived experiences of those directly affected by the purge campaign and people's resistance to it. It must centrally point out how the government, the military, the RCMP and the administration of the public service were directly responsible for this campaign if we want to both *remember* and *ensure* it never happens again.

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