

## **‘We are unstoppable, another world is possible!’**

### **– Queer Crowd in Groningen calls for action**

**On Saturday the first Queer Pride march was held in Groningen to mark the end of Pride week. Protesters spoke out against all forms of oppression and for a better world.**

*By Lehn Knautd*

The air is buzzing on the Grote Markt of Groningen. It is Saturday, early afternoon, and people from all over the Netherlands are gathering for the first ever Queer Pride Groningen (QPG). ‘This is our day to show we’re still here, we’re still fighting!’, explains Almudena, who flies a big lesbian pride flag while she waits for the speeches to start.

The crowd around her features similar flags for different sections of the LGBTQIA+ community, countless variations of rainbow and glitter accessories, fabulous fashion choices, and protest signs with political messages, such as ‘Crush the Cistem’, ‘Liberation 4 all’ and ‘Feminists & Queers against Capitalism’.

Some attendees are still new to the community and a bit nervous about participating in their first Pride, but many seem quite at home, excitedly greeting friends wherever they turn, waving at familiar faces, and forming new connections. Quite a few of them are seasoned Pride-visitors by now, like Annabelle, who wears the pansexual pride colours like a cape and has travelled to Prides in other Dutch cities in the past. Now she is excited to finally have one so close to home – especially one that goes back to the roots of queer liberation and prioritizes protest over party.

#### **Pride is protest**

Shortly after 2 pm, Veerle Ros from the QPG-committee takes the podium to welcome everyone, accompanied by Sylvia Bouman from Clubhuis Voor Doven, a sign language interpreter who translates the speeches and performances of the day.

Ros emphasizes that the Groninger Pride is meant as a return to the roots of the queer liberation movement, which emerged from the Stonewall Riots 50 years ago, when the queer community of Greenwich Village, New York, fought back against police harassment.

While today, many prides have turned into highly commercialized parties, QPG Groningen complements celebration with protest and education. The march presents the culmination of a full week’s programme of discussions, film screenings and cultural events shining light on different aspects of LGBTQIA+ history and liberation.

Ros explains how, months ago, the organizers laid down their fundamental principles: This Pride should be organized by the community for the community. It should be inclusive specifically of its more marginalized members, and therefore not give a platform to right-wing, racist or capitalist voices.

It should be a protest, drawing attention to the ongoing struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community, and therefore also be independent from any corporate sponsors who do not actively support marginalized groups. With the help of non-profit funds as well as donations from within the community, QPG managed to achieve financial autonomy, without having to compromise their politics.

## **For an inclusive world**

The day is filled with reminders that the struggles within the community are diverse, and that without active inclusion, many groups are left out in the cold. Throughout the march, chants loudly call for liberation and revolution as well as solidarity with refugees, Muslim, Jewish and Black people. 'We are unstoppable, another world is possible', proclaims the crowd, and stops in the main shopping street of Groningen for an energetic 'A-Anti-Anticapitalista!'

The pride flags the organizers have provided and that fly above the protesters' heads not only include the classic rainbow (with brown and black stripes), but also colours that are less visible at Prides across the world, such as those representing intersex, asexual and aromantic communities.

And while the first block is protesting at the top of their lungs, the following two sections of the march are for people uncomfortable with or incapable of chanting, one with music, one silent. Volunteers hand out earplugs to those sensitive to noise and have been briefed to respond to individual requests regarding accessibility. Police presence is minimal.

## **Solidarity**

The speakers and performers of the day join the QPG-committee in taking (mostly) explicitly political approaches. Milly is the first one after the organizers to take the stage and sings 'Caged Bird' and Nina Simone's 'I wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free', which reflect her experiences as a Black transwoman. 'Black trans women are often not acknowledged for their big role in starting the queer liberation movement', she reminds her audience.

Mo Saleh and Sandro Kortekaas from the Stichting LGBT Asylum Support draw attention to the absurd procedures (and their serious consequences) by which the Dutch government requires queer refugees to prove their sexual orientation and present the ongoing petition [#nietgaygenoeg](#).

Charly Jazbor shares experiences of having a nonbinary gender in a binary society and describes how everyone from passer-by's to medical staff feels entitled to intimate knowledge about their body and identity. Again and again, speakers call for active solidarity within and beyond the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly in the current political climate with its ongoing shift to the right.

## **Success**

In the course of their preparations, the organizers have faced doubts as to whether they could achieve their ambitious goal of pulling off a Pride without corporate sponsorship, as well as [backlash](#) by people who considered them exclusive towards more conservative members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

After the march, however, the responses are overwhelmingly positive. 1200 people have joined in, even though Utrecht Pride takes place the same day.

Many of them applaud the decision to focus on queer politics and praise the level of inclusivity that has been achieved. "We feel safe here", say Namata Letecia and Areas Mohammed Ssewagudde, who came from Assen to meet different people from their own community.

The sentiment is shared by other participants who do not always feel welcome or comfortable at mainstreamed Pride events. Some enthusiastic visitors have already asked how they can get involved for the next edition and promised to return for QPG 2020.