

We Demand

CANADA'S FIRST GAY MARCH



LE CENTRE CANADIEN DE LA
DIVERSITÉ DES GENRES
+ DE LA **SEXUALITÉ**



THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR
GENDER+SEXUAL
DIVERSITY



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien



Please follow the steps to complete the zone:

- 1) Watch the video
- 2) Read through the booklet contents
- 3) Answer the discussion questions as a group

Content warning

Sexual and gender-based discrimination, homophobia, police violence

a call for change

On August 28th in 1971, over 150 LGBT people gathered on Parliament Hill with a list of 10 demands for changes to be made to Canadian laws. It became known as the "We Demand" protest; one of the first steps in a long fight for 2SLGBTQ+ equality.

Two years earlier, Canada's Criminal Code was changed with the Omnibus Bill, which partially decriminalized homosexuality (before 1969, people could be arrested and imprisoned for being gay or lesbian). However, the new laws still discriminated against 2SLGBTQ+ people in many ways. For example, 2SLGBTQ+ people were not allowed to serve in the military, could not immigrate into Canada, and would not get custody rights of their children in the case of a divorce.

The Omnibus Bill also included changes to the abortion laws and women's reproductive rights. However, like the legal changes around homosexuality, the protection of abortion and reproductive rights within Canada's laws was not universal.

The protesters came from all across Ontario, and a similar protest took place in Vancouver at the same time. The protesters wished to enter Parliament and present their report, with the demands, to members of Parliament, but they were not allowed to enter. They stood on the steps in the rain and read out the demands to the people gathered. At the time, the small group of protesters did not know what an important impact their actions would carry. Today, all but two of the demands have been met.

The Criminal Code



The Criminal Code is a document where all the criminal laws in Canada are written. The Code is full of all the rules that have to be followed; if someone breaks a rule, they can be convicted of a crime.

Did you know?



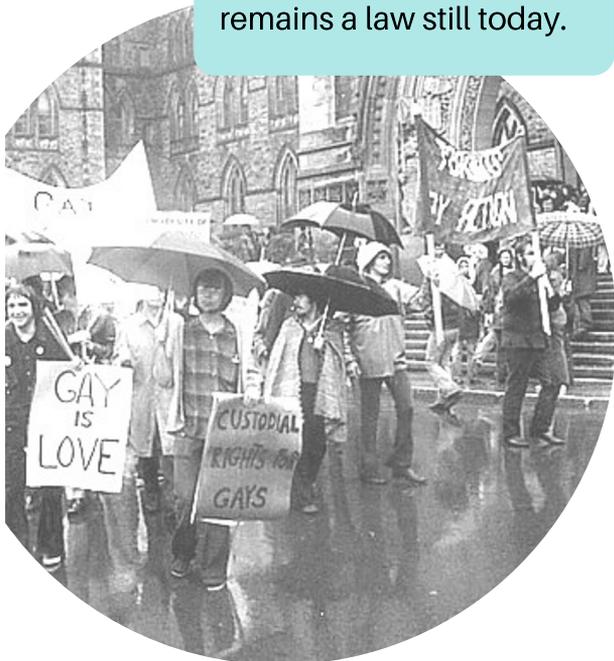
Reverend Dr. Cheri Dinovo was the only woman to sign the "We Demand" statement in 1971. She was also responsible for passing Toby's Act in 2012, which included gender identity and gender expression in the Ontario Human Rights Code, and for successfully banning conversion therapy in Ontario in 2015.

Did you know?

"Gross indecency", "indecent acts", and "buggery" were terms used to refer to homosexual acts. This could be anything from sexual relations to holding hands in public.

Did you know?

The age of consent for penetrative sex is 18 years old for people who identify as male. For everyone else, the age of consent is 16. This remains a law still today.



Read the 10 demands below:

1. Remove and replace "gross indecency" and "indecent act" from the Criminal Code; change "in private" in the Criminal Code to mean "a condition of privacy."
2. Remove "gross indecency" and "buggery" as grounds for arrest as a "dangerous sexual offender."
3. A uniform age of consent for all female and male homosexual and heterosexual acts
4. Change the Immigration Act so that it does not reference homosexuals or "homosexuality."
5. The right of equal employment and promotion at all government levels for homosexuals.
6. Change the Divorce Act be amended so that homosexual acts cannot be used as grounds for divorce; allow equal right of child custody to both parents, regardless of sexual orientation.
7. The right of homosexuals to serve in the Armed Forces without being convicted of misconduct or illegal acts.
8. Investigate whether the RCMP has a practice of targeting homosexual individuals working in public service in order to let them go, and if so, to end the practice and destroy any records that were collected.
9. Equal legal rights for homosexuals and heterosexuals.
10. All public officials and law enforcement agents to do everything they can to address negative attitudes and discrimination against homosexuals.

Homosexuals list grievances in protest on Hill

About 40 members of associations of homosexual people across Ontario gathered on Parliament Hill in the pouring rain Saturday afternoon to protest what they called widespread discrimination from "a society which practises heterosexual imperialism."

Before a small audience huddled under the portico of the Centre Block to escape the rain, leaders of the demonstration read out a multi-paged brief detailing their grievances.

George Hislop, chairman of the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT), called for amendments to the Criminal Code to eliminate references to homosexuality as grounds for "discriminatory treatment." Among the demands they are presenting to the government are:

- Elimination of the terms "gross indecency"

and "indecent act" from the Criminal Code and replace them with a list of specific offences.

- Amendment to the Immigration Act to remove any reference to homosexuality.

- Homosexuals be allowed to serve in the armed forces.

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- Compel the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to say whether it is their policy to investigate government employees to determine if they are homosexual.

The demonstrators, many of them arm in arm or holding hands, bore placards and chanted rhymes defending their personal convictions.

Homosexual women (lesbians) also participated

in the short march in front of the Peace Tower and supported the brief to the government.

Spokesmen for the groups claimed current laws permitted conditions in which homosexuals were

particularly susceptible to blackmail. They said such prejudice against homosexuals made it necessary for them to take any steps available to prevent disclosure of the fact.



—Citizen-Lips staff photo

Saturday's demonstrators on Parliament Hill carried self-explanatory placards.

A newspaper article from 1971 talks about the demonstrations on Parliament Hill.

Did you know?

If you ever visit Ottawa, you will find a mural on Bank Street depicting the We Demand protest.

It is a dedicated to the people who changed the course of Canadian history for good.



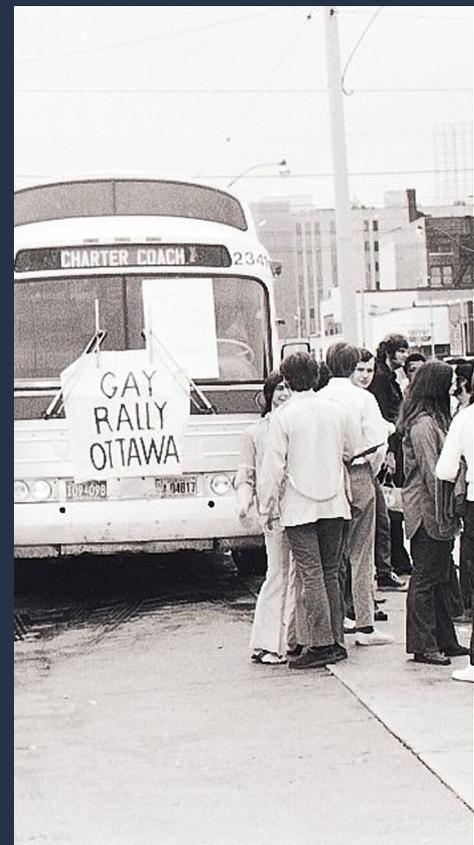
Discussion Questions

1) What might a list of 10 demands look like today?

a) How would they be similar or different?

b) As a student, what demands would you make to your school to create a more inclusive environment?

2) In 2019, it will be 50 years since homosexuality was partially decriminalized in Canada. Reading the demands, how do you think 2SLGBTQ+ rights in Canada have changed, or how have they not?



Sources used in this booklet:

CBC. (1971, August 28). "The First Gay March." *CBC Digital Archives*.

McKinnon, N. (2011, July 6). "The First Gay Protest in Canada." *Xtra*.

The Village Legacy Project. (2019). "Ottawa LGBT History: 'We Demand'."

The Village Legacy Project



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