

# Genoa 7/20

***By Starhawk***

At this point its still not clear to me how many are actually dead. I've heard one young man, I've heard two, four. I've heard that the police shot into the crowd, that someone was clubbed to the ground and, unconscious, run over by a car, I've heard it was the White Overalls, the Black Bloc, I don't know. I know what I saw.

The day started as a spirited, peaceful demonstration. I was on the Piazza Manini with the Womens' Action and Rette Lilliput, a religious ecological network. Both groups were completely committed to nonviolence. My friend and training partner Lisa Fithian was down at the convergence center with the pink bloc, the group that wanted to do creative, fun, street theater, dancing and music as part of their action. Lisa is a great person to be with in an action: she's experienced, never panics, moves fast and knows what to look for, has a voice that can carry over a huge crowd and a great ability to move people. I wish she were going to be with us, but I feel like we've divided our talents well. Ill help move the smaller Womens' contingent, help them with ritual and work some magic. Lisa will help the much larger and boisterous Pink Bloc become mobile and coherent. We hope to meet up sometime during the day.

Around 1 PM, the women march from the piazza down to the wall with probably three or four thousand people. The women gather in a circle for a spiral dance, singing "Siamo la luna che move la marea," "We are the moon that moves the tides, we will change the world with our ideas." We brew up a lovely magical cauldrona big pot full of water from sacred places and whatever else women want to add: rose petals, a hair or two, tobacco from a cigarette., that symbolize the visions we hold of a different world. Its a sweet, symbolic action not quite as satisfying, perhaps, as tearing the wall down, but empowering to the women who take part. The police are relaxed, these groups are clearly no threat to anyone. Monica negotiates with the police, and we are allowed to go up to the wall in small groups to pin up underwear(residents of the Red Zone were threatened with fines if they hung out their laundry during the G8 apparently the site of washing might unnerve the delegates), banners, messages and spill our water under the fence.

(Helicopters buzz the house as I write, the news is discussing violence and nonviolence in Italian, and I stretch my memory of high school French to ask one of the women staying here in a phrase we never covered, "How many

people died today?" One, she tells me, and one is in the hospital in critical condition.)

Then the Pink march arrives, trapped in a cross street by our march. We open a lane and let them through. They are delightful, mostly young, some all punked out in wildly colored hair or dreadlocks or bright pink wigs, drumming, dancing, cavorting through the crowd. They turn the corner and filter into the next square down the wall, only a short half-block from the street we've occupied.

On our street, everyone is sitting peacefully and having lunch. I walk over to the Pink Bloc to see what's going on. I drum for a while with the accordion player. People are milling about and there's nothing clear that's happening, when suddenly a line of police has blocked one of the exits. Dancing youth are wildly leaping and stomping in front of them, but that's all they are doing. Much of the Pink Bloc has moved on, they appear a block or two above the square, with the police now trapped between groups of Pink.

I am just thinking that this is not a good situation when a tear gas canister lands in front of me. I start to move away, back down to the street where the women are. Just a mild hit, I wash out my eyes, help a few others whose eyes are streaming and red. Lisa appears, and we go back for another look. This time the gas catches us in a bad situation, with the way back to the street blocked, and another exit up a staircase too full of bodies. I am getting hit heavily, my lungs and eyes burning but I remember that helpful hint from all the trainings we have done. I can breathe, I really can breathe, and fear is the most powerful weapon. Lisa has better eye protection, she takes my hand and leads me out. I wash them out again. This seems like a good moment to leave. I gather up what's left of the women, Lisa and others get the Pink Bloc together, I begin a drumbeat and we start up the street, which is also up a hill. The march feels powerful and joyful. We are retreating, but in a strong way, moving on to the next action, still together.

The good feeling lasts until we reach the top of the hill. Somehow the Black Bloc have become trapped between the pacifist affinity groups and the police. Monica is on the cell phone, upset and tearful when she learns that the Black Bloc have trashed an old part of the city. "It's over," she says. "after all our months of work! Let's go home."

I am trying to find out what the women want to do: Lisa is trying to find out what the Pink Bloc wants to do, when suddenly massive amounts of tear gas fill the square. I am moving away from it, down a side street, trying to convince myself that I can breathe, when I notice that I'm somehow in the midst of the Black Bloc. They run past me, younger, faster, much better

equipped, and the police are behind them. I do not want to be here. I'm fifty years old, and I was never very fast even when I was young. For the first time, I come close to panicking.

But below is a side street, and the wind blows the gas away. I can breath. I duck down the alley. Like most of the streets in this hillside are, it winds around the side of ridge, with a sheer drop below, and snakes back to the main street. A small clump of Pink is sheltering there. I join them, we wait as the Black Block thunders by one street away. Lisa appears to tell us that the riot cops are coming up from below. They're beating people brutally. We check the exits, fearing we're trapped, but suddenly the street we came in on is clear. I and a few others make a break for it, get across and head up a stairway on the other side. Lisa goes back to see if she can help move the others. Before she can, the police have found the alley. They beat people hard, going for the head. They beat pacifists who approach them with their hands up; they beat women. A battered crowd gathers on the stairs, moves up a level or two. I comfort a young man with a head wound, a woman who is crying, her thigh covered with the blood of her boyfriend who had been taken to the hospital. We are all shaken.

Slowly, a pink contingent gathers on the stairs. We move up and up; in this part of town, half the streets are stairways that rise in endless zig zag flights. Below us, we see contingents of riot cops sweep the streets. The helicopter above move on, following the Black Bloc. Lisa is moving back and forth across the street and back to the square, checking out rumors, trying to figure out what's going on and where we might go. We eventually make our way back to the square. One of the women has been gassed so badly shes been vomiting, but she wants to stay. Another women from our contingent was hit in the head by a cop and taken to the hospital. A whole lot of people have been badly hurt, people who clearly and unmistakably are not rock throwing, streetfighting youth, people who believed they were going to be in a peaceful and reasonably safe place. Lisa and I had done a training for the women, trying to give them some sense of what they might face on the streets from our experience in other actions. But theres no real way to prepare for a cop beating a peaceful, non-agressive, midde-aged woman on the head.

The Pink Bloc begins a long journey back to the other side of town. Were joined by some of the others from the square and by some of the Italian Pacifist Affinity groups who have been trying to hold space on this side. As were trying to make our decision, with translation into English, Italian Spanish and French, Some of the Black Bloc drifts up from below and asks if they can join us to make our common way to the bottom of the town. Some of the group are angry at the Bloc and unwilling to take the risk of joining

with them or being associated with them. Others feel that we should hold solidarity with everyone, and not leave anyone vulnerable to the police. Eventually, the group offers to accept them if they'll unmask and leave their sticks behind. They wont do that, they say we should each respect each others way of doing things, so they'll go down alone, letting us go first.

Theres more, mostly a series of moments of being trapped in an intersection here or a stairway there, but after around two or three hours we made it back to the convergence center. I'm far too tired to make sense of this day right now, its all I can do to describe it, and its after midnight and people have to go to bed. Someone is dead, and the night is not over.

-- *Starhawk*

Copyright (c) 2001 by Starhawk. All rights reserved. This copyright protects Starhawk's right to future publication of her work. Nonprofit, activist, and educational groups may circulate this essay (forward it, reprint it, translate it, post it, or reproduce it) for nonprofit uses. Please do not change any part of it without permission. Readers are invited to visit the web site: [www.starhawk.org](http://www.starhawk.org).