

Miami Journal #6: Monday, 11/17/03

As you will see from the story below, we do not, after all, have housing yet in Miami. Your "support task du jour" (11/18)--call Mayor Diaz and demand that the city of Miami provide a space for FTAA activists to be housed, and stop harassment and pre-emptive arrests of activists.

Thanks! *Starhawk*

Contact information:

Mayor Manny Diaz 305-250-5300 email to his chief of staff,
Francois Illas: (that's an "eye" and two "ells" in Illas)

FIllas@ci.miami.fl.us

mayor's website: <http://www.ci.miami.fl.us/mayor/synopsis.as>

Homeless in Miami

By Starhawk

Lola is cooking me eggs when I get a frantic call at twenty to 8:00 in the morning from Stephan of Citizen's Trade Watch, "The meeting is early, come down here now!" I scramble to send off my update, dress, and pack for the day's events, while Juniper and Lisa and Gloria do the same. We pile into the car. Lola hands me a sandwich of eggs on toast, and we drive quickly to the campground, only to find that the police have closed the downtown exits already in anticipation of the FTAA actions and traffic is snarled. We get there eventually and find a whole lot of various officials standing around, in the way officials stand around at the scene of a crime or disaster. There are assistant county managers and city managers and lawyers and all of us introducing ourselves and trying to have conversations and being called on our cell phones, and it is very hard to figure out what is going on. The county, it seems, is trying to help us, while the city is being obstructive. The county wants to give us shelter, a huge 27,000 sq. foot tent, but the city will not issue the necessary permit to put it up. Would small tents, ten by ten feet, be acceptable? But then it seems the

problem is whether we can use the land at all. It's under the jurisdiction of the city, but it belongs to the state, and is leased to a private agency for the homeless called Camillus House which will be building on the site. Camillus House wants to let us use the land but they need an okay from the lawyers from the state. We all agree to have an 11:00 o'clock meeting with lawyers from all the agencies, and go off.

We decide that Juniper is the person to go to the meeting from our group, as she is an environmental engineer in her other life and gets paid to negotiate permits. We offer to pay her twice her usual fee in fairy dollars. Meanwhile I have a short meeting about the anarchist/pagan ritual and the 19th. We decide to focus on the ritual and let go of trying to plan an action for the 19th--there's a possibility Root Cause will plan something and we agree to support them. Ruby, Lev, Ryan and Sara and I go off downtown to join the outreach action. Because people have been being harassed by police and often detained or even arrested for passing out flyers and talking to shopkeepers, we've decided to go down in a large body and do outreach all together. By the time we get there, lots of activists are wandering up and down the downtown streets, talking to shop-owners and passersby. We join them. Cops are everywhere, circling on bikes, parked in cars on nearly every corner, stationed outside jewelry stores to prevent the anarchist thugs from carting off the diamonds, we presume.

Miami is said to be the poorest large urban center in the United States, and its downtown seems caught in a time warp. It's a perfectly preserved, somewhat seedy, relic of the downtowns of my childhood in the fifties, with streets of independent stores, many of them owned by immigrants, and none of the glossy, standardized chains, no GAP, no Pottery Barn, no Old Navy, no Office Depot. I like it. It reminds me of being a kid, when Downtown was an exciting place to go. We would dress up, and for a special treat, we might have lunch in a department store restaurant, which I thought was the height of glamour.

Although the police have done their usual campaign of intimidation and fear mongering, people are mostly very glad to talk to us, to take our flyers and hear what we have to say. No one is hostile. Many are curious. I explain the FTAA carefully to a woman who speaks with a Caribbean lilt, and she listens carefully although she looks tired. "This is bad for me," she says finally. "The FTAA. It means no jobs here." She gets it.

On the corner, the cops have three of our friends and appear to be arresting them. We stand and watch for a while, and call our

legal support, but move on when it becomes clear there's nothing else we can do. Ryan and Sara have already been arrested once for walking on the sidewalk, and they'd like to stay out of jail at least until the action begins.

We talk with three unemployed workers off cruise ships--or rather, they talk to us, about working long hours, sixteen hours a day, for \$150 a month, and how the unions were no help to them because the ships were always registered in other countries. And now they are unemployed and have no work at all. One is from Honduras, one from Haiti, one from somewhere in the Caribbean. "And what about that, how do you call it, that making private of water?" one says. "Privatization," Andy says, and mentions Bolivia and everyone shakes their heads sadly. "How can that be, that people have to pay to drink water?" our friend asks. We encourage them to come out to the march on the 20th, and they say they'll be there.

We catch up with the others, who are talking to a woman with a sculpted, dark face and haunted eyes who flinches when we approach. "It's okay, they're friends," Ruby says.

"I'm nervous," the woman says. "I got woke up this morning by the cops kickin' me in the face. They've been on me all day. I was just trying to get some food for me and my boys. We ain't had nothin' to eat for three days. But the soup kitchen was closed, they say because of the demonstrations." We give her some money, and she goes on with her sad tale of police harassment and brutality. She's terrified of all the cops in the area, who are swooping through the streets in packs on their bicycles, like schools of circling sharks. I offer to walk her to somewhere safer--an instinctive response that comes from all that time I spent in the Occupied Territories, walking people past soldiers and checkpoints and tanks. It just seems that if someone is terrified of some armed authority, I ought to walk them somewhere. The woman is asking for eight dollars. If she had eight dollars, she could take her and her boys to their grandmother in Fort Lauderdale. Her grandmother has said she could come back. She wants to get her boys out of this environment. I am pretty sure this is a scam but it makes me so sad that I would have given her eight dollars in a minute if I'd brought more change with me. The typical homeless scam is maybe just the dream that keeps you going when you have nothing, nothing at all but a patch of sidewalk and boot in the face for a wakeup call--that somewhere there is a safe place, a place where you would be welcome, and that just a little bit of help would get you there. Or maybe that's what we want to believe for them--that just eight dollars and a ticket to Fort

Lauderdale would remove this misery and we wouldn't have to think about it any more, wouldn't have to let our well being be haunted by this woman's ghosts seeping in through the cracks of our imagination.

We're here, all of us who have come to challenge this wall which has been built to protect the delegates, because somewhere, somehow, our own walls have been breached, and the comprehension of misery has seeped in and made us sad and enraged enough to act. And because we are hopeful and resoundingly optimistic, as well. We know that it will take far more than eight dollars and a ticket to the next town to bring this woman to a safe place, to create a home for her. And yet we also know how simply and easily we could do it, if our will and our resources were put to that end.

I call Juniper. The meeting has gone well--the paperwork is underway and they will start setting up the tents this afternoon. Curly and Gloria will be there to help direct them. Then Ruby and Lev and I hook up with Susan and Michael and go off to Miami Beach for an action at the GAP where I have promised to speak. The Fisher family, who own the GAP, also own hundreds of thousands of acres of redwood forest in Mendocino County which they have been logging unsustainably. Mary Bull and the Gapatistas have travelled cross country with a giant redwood stump, staging demonstrations at GAP stores in many cities. Miami Beach is far more prosperous than downtown, and we pass by streets of landscaped estate homes and upscale shops housed in pastel buildings with the rounded curves of the art deco era. It too, seems almost a museum piece of fifties glamour. The police have diverted traffic for many blocks up and down the street near the GAP, and a helicopter circles overhead.

The crowd is small and the speakers can hardly be heard or seen for the media snapping and filming. The Gapatistas have hit on a winning media strategy--the "I'd Rather Wear Nothing than Wear GAP" campaign. After the speeches, they will strip. It's not easy to get a sensationalist press to cover real issues, which could be one argument for breaking windows--it gets attention. So does becoming the victim of a shark attack, but the Gapatistas are not willing to employ either of those strategies; instead, they take off their clothes. This usually brings out the press in a new town, and at the end we can see items of clothing flying out of the inner circle behind the cameras. Everyone cheers--the action is over. Elizabeth shows off her underwear as the press disperse and we can see her--the front panel says "Protect Virgin Forests" and the back

says "Crap!"

A few of us go down to the beach, and strip off our clothes simply for the pleasure of jumping in the water and letting the cool, green waves lift us up and carry us down. We splash about like a pack of happy seals for a bit, then head back to the Convergence Center. On the way I get a frantic call from Curly. The media are at the campground and he doesn't know what to do. I ask if there are any campers there and he says only one or two. I tell him we're on the way and that it's okay about the media for now.

A few blocks away, we get an even more frantic call. The police are there, now, and he couldn't keep them out. "I'm not dealing with them at all," he says and we reassure him that we're almost there.

We arrive to find most of the crew from the morning standing around again, this time in a much more agitated fashion. The tent crew has begun setting up tents but now they've stopped. Suzy, the manager from the county who was warm and helpful this morning, is demanding to know if we really have authorization from Camillus House. She's scared that she has let the tents get set up illegally. I have already put in a call to Juniper who is heading over and I tell her that to my knowledge, everything was set this morning and we had okays from all the necessary parties, but I wasn't at the meeting and the person who was is coming. Dr. Capp from the Community Relations Board is there, and his big, solid, warm presence is comforting and seems to radiate a calm and good-humored authority. But there are so many agencies, bureaucracies, lawyers and different stories involved that it becomes completely confusing. The police are standing quietly in the background, but they're there. Channel Seven is eager to film. I am thinking quietly to myself that this whole sequence of events is a perfect argument for anarchism. Finally Juniper arrives, and we try to sort things out. Meanwhile the tents have been taken down and the parts reloaded on the trucks. A few campers have started to arrive, but they turn back when they see the scene in progress. I get Channel Seven to film an interview with Juniper, who is lovely and convincing on the subject of the city's unwillingness to provide for public health and safety. "Eight point five million dollars to teargas me," she says, referring to a line item in the 87 billion dollar Iraq appropriations bill. "And not 25 cents for water!"

We go back to the Convergence Center to strategize. It is now crowded, wall to wall, with people newly arrived and attending

the first General Assembly, to deal with our own internal processes. I am afraid to think about how we will fit in the thousands and thousands more who may materialize over the next days.

But I have to go off to the Unitarian Church for a ritual. I head off with Nyx and Tom, who drives like an anarchist but gets us there in time to eat some of the potluck dinner that has been provided for the group of Unitarians who have come from Portland for the protests. I am in action/survival mode now and head straight for the food. My friend Luigi is there and it is good to see him--he is tired from organizing a big Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender conference a week ago but has brought his men's group to drum. The Reverend Lucy who has arranged this evening was in jail with us many years ago when we were protesting nuclear weapons at the Livermore Labs in California. I speak a bit before the ritual, and it's a relief to not need to go through the whole FTAA bit because this crowd already knows what it's about--that's why they're here. We raise some powerful, beautiful energy for the actions, then head back to our Pagan cluster house for a late-night meeting and magic. More people have come in, including my friend Donna who has brought our eight-minute video on the Green Bloc and permaculture projects in past actions. It's great fun to watch it with everybody. We keep the meeting short, and do ritual, a drumming/chanting trance. And finally, at 2 a.m., go to bed, waiting to see if the morning will bring a home at last for the multitudes who will be arriving soon, or if the action will remain among the homeless of Miami.

These updates are posted at:
www.starhawk.org
www.utne.com

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