

Miami Journal #9: Thursday, 11/20/03

11-21-03 Preface:

URGENT: Today there were mass arrests at the jail vigil, and ongoing police harrassment and brutality. Protestors at the vigil were told by police to stand on the sidewalk and they would be safe, then surrounded, knocked down, beaten and arrested. We desperately need political pressure on the city of Miami. We are witnessing a true police state here, and we need your help to call and write:

Mayor Manny Diaz

305-250-5300

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

(will open in a new browser window)

Alex Penelas Mayor of the County of Miami

305-829-9336

305-375-5071

Police Chief Timoney

305-673-7925

305-579-6565

Demand an end to police brutality, dropping the charges and releasing the prisoners, and demand that Timoney be fired for gross abuse of power. Tonight he said on the news that until the last protestor is gone from Miami, he will continue to 'pick them off.' This all is being done to people who have simply been exercising our right to speak out, and who in many cases were simply walking on the sidewalk.

Below is a full update from Thursday--Friday's will have to wait as it is now past 3:00 a.m.

-- *Starhawk*

Praise the Wind

By Starhawk

I wake up instantly at 5:00 a.m. when I hear others in the house moving around. The calm of the day before is gone, and my stomach is one big knot of tension. Quickly we eat, dress, grab our stuff for the day, and head to our other Pagan house to connect up with the others. We do a quick Tarot reading: Judgment reversed is the signicator, the card of the dead reawakening. Lots of positive influences, but reversed, blunted.

The affinity group that is supposed to drive us does not show up, so we quickly rearrange our plans, fill the cars, and head out. We're full of that pre-action tension. A drawbridge over one of the canals goes up, Oh shit, oh shit, we'll never get there...they are keeping us out of downtown...but it goes down again, and we get dropped off successfully near Government Center, the meeting place for the action.

Masses of people are gathering--not tens of thousand but probably a thousand, and we form up our cluster and review our flags. We have one flag for the high risk sector of the cluster, one for the mid-level support and one for those who want to be in the safest place possible, and we have an experienced person for each of the flags.

We are waiting for the puppets, who are supposed to be marching down from the Convergence Center with most of the black bloc--those who will march masked and dressed in black. They are late--and finally the puppets arrive in a truck. I am mostly thinking about how and where to pee, which is the ongoing, underlying challenge in every action. There is no good spot, but we gather a small circle on the grass, huddle around each other and take turns squatting in the middle.

And the march heads off. We're drumming and dancing--the puppets are beautiful--great birds of liberation with giant, floating wings. I am thinking about our friends who are marching in London against Bush, and in Brazil and Argentina in solidarity with us, and feeling the web of connection.

We get within a block or two of the fence, and find lines of riot cops blocking the way. The high energy begins to dissipate as we discuss what to do. Some people want to continue marching in one large group, others want to hold different intersections or try in smaller groups to find a way to the sections of fence that some people will try to dismantle. The problem is, most of the serious dismantlers are trapped by the police blocks away from here with the contingent that left from the Convergence Center.

Then suddenly the way opens up to the section of fence that fronts on Biscayne Avenue, where the street is wide and open. It's also the section we've promised the AFL-CIO would remain relatively low-conflict all day. We march in and fill the space.

The fence is made of steel, in vertical sections mounted on a wide horizontal base so they cannot be easily tipped. Behind the fence, cherry pickers make elevated gun towers where armed police stand waiting to shoot at anyone who attempts to climb.

I am looking for a spot where the cluster can hold some space and do a spiral dance, and I am so tired from days and days of little sleep that I am half in trance. So I'm in a kind of dual consciousness, part of me alert and aware and scanning for danger and part of me watching the whole scene from somewhere deep below, seeing the energies and the spirits beneath the surface. We're right in the spot where two days ago I felt huge energies gathering, and now I feel nothing. It's as if the whole section is energetically dead, a blank spot in the universe. Of all the things that are to happen this day, this is probably the most frightening, because it is completely out of my experience--as if the area were being bombarded with some kind of energy-dispersing ray, a field of gray cast by the dementors, a pall of apathy and hopelessness and dull despair.

Nevertheless, we form up a circle and begin singing and chanting. Some energy builds. I am drumming and Nyx pulls out her finger cymbals and begins to dance. She's in her sixties, with bright red hair and a pointed, feathered hat and she's like a spot of brightness and good humor in the midst of the gray, the metallic sound of her cymbals cutting through the haze. A corps of young drummers is nearby and I get Geneva to run and recruit them and bring them into the center of the circle, and Ruby leads the spiral as we sing, "No army can hold back a thought, no fence can chain the sea. The earth cannot be sold or bought, all life can be free."

The energy inside our circle starts to feel good, and to build power. I am thinking we are going to have an easy day, that the strategy of the police will be to let us have this space but keep us away from other sections of the fence, and the big challenge will be keeping the group from simply getting bored and wandering off. So I decide to keep the spiral energy going instead of building it into a peak, and nod at Ruby to keep dancing in and out. I am drumming in the center to help keep the drum corps and the chanting in synch, and the energy of

the group bathes me. I decide to use it to investigate the weird deadness of the area, and drop down into trance. (This is a kids-don't-try-this-at-home technique--meaning I wouldn't recommend it for someone who isn't experienced in both deep trance and street actions, because it requires being able to make a major shift in consciousness instantly without getting the psychic equivalent of the bends.) What I see when I drop down are images of corpses, gray, bloated corpses, and a sense of an utter, soulless, hopeless lack of life. And I'm thinking about the Judgment card. Maybe our task is somehow to wake the dead. But there's a sickening feel to this energy. I start to cough and almost vomit, wondering if perhaps they are using some new neurotoxin on us or bombarding us with some sci-fi ray, but I feel more like I'm simply nauseated by contact with this energy. But I keep breathing it through, and releasing it, and calling on life energies to come in and cleanse it. There's an emptiness here so deep, like an energetic black hole, that I don't know what can fill it. I start invoking Oya, orisha of wind and fire, the sudden storm, and suddenly I feel power flooding through me and the energy of the drums and the chant begins to build and grow.

Next to us a small group of about six kids, masked and dressed in black, runs up and tosses grappling hooks tied to ropes at the fence. The hooks don't catch too well, the ropes are too thin to pull the fence over and too short to allow the pullers to stay out of firing range, and there is a cherry picker filled with cops right next to them, who immediately begin firing indiscriminately at the entire crowd.

We hear loud explosions and the air is filled with smoke and an acrid, burning gas. Rubber bullets are flying and people start to run but a whole lot of us call out, "Walk, walk," and form up a line and move back slowly in a disciplined way. We fall back a ways, and a line of riot cops in full gear comes out and blocks our way back to the fence. Andy has been hit in the shoulder by a rubber bullet. I recognize that the noise is from sound bombs and suspect they are firing the new pepper spray pellets as my face and nose sting. We regroup the cluster, wait warily until we see, across the street, the line of cops trying to push back the crowd and some kind of altercation. Andy and I, Lisa and Charles, run over. The cops have someone down on the ground and they are beating on him and Andy and I and others jump in front and face them, trying to calm the situation, doing all the classic, nonviolent things, staying calm ourselves, looking them in the eye, talking in a soothing voice. Behind us the crowd is angry and we are trying to calm the more hotheaded before they make themselves vulnerable to the cops. Meanwhile the

crowd pulls back the protestor who's been beaten. The cops are now shoving us with their nightsticks, yelling, "Get back, get back." I am now right next to Ryan and Sara, in a front line of black-clad anarchists who are slowing the cops and trying to de-escalate them, giving the crowd behind us time to move away, keeping control of our retreat so that it does not become a panicked flight. I'm talking to the cop in front of me, who is snarling back. The cop behind him is the one who has been out of control and beating people, and the crowd begins chanting his badge number. One of the cops has a small, mean-looking gun with a long snout and he aims it at me and shoots me directly in the eye with a stream of pepper spray.

The stuff covers my face and hair and streams down my arm. I still have my contact lenses in and my hands are now soaked in pepper spray so I can't pull them out myself. We all fall back, move away from the cops who are shooting rubber bullets at us all. Lisa gets shot in the hip. The cops also stop, and I ask Andy to take my lens out but he doesn't know how. The stuff burns but half of all pain is panic and I'm not panicked, just concerned because lenses can trap the oil and cause permanent damage. Lisa comes over and pulls the lens out for me and I am washing my eyes with water, and then they get the medics to wash them out with the liquid antacid solution we've found most effective. Elizabeth has been badly sprayed as well and I tell her, "Fifteen minutes--just remember it's going to hurt for fifteen minutes and then it will be all right."

We get led back to the cluster and move to a position in the shade near the intersection where we will not be trapped if the police sweep through. We try to decide what to do, and share some food. I am a bit shaken but am really okay, and after a few minutes the burning does diminish.

The street calms down. The AFL rally is beginning to assemble, and I am enjoying watching the contingents come in, carrying their flags and banners. We are told that if we go into the rally we won't be able to get out, so we decide instead to go to lunch. I go sit in a cafe with Lisa, so tired that I can't even eat although I think I should. I drink some hot tea, and relax for a moment. In walks Oscar Olivera, one of the leaders of the uprising in Bolivia when they kicked out the water privatizers and took back control of their own water system. I greet him, remind him that he has been in my house in San Francisco, and we talk. I ask him how he likes the new Bolivian president, and he shrugs, making that universal hand gesture for "some good, some bad."

Then we go out and join some of our friends who are sitting at sidewalk tables. Our friends from the Sweetwater affinity group have joined us, bringing the Living River which we will carry in the march. Nyx and some of the others are drumming and dancing in the street, and I eat someone's leftover quesadilla and feel some more energy. Suddenly I want to dance, too, and I jump up and begin whirling around, invoking Oya and praising the wind. I get my drum, and soon we have a street party, with passersby joining in the dance. In spite of the huge, fearmongering campaign waged by the cops, who have told people we will shoot them with squirt guns full of urine and feces, and invented other charming lies, we've had almost nothing but positive support from the actual people of Miami who are always smiling and waving and giving us a thumbs-up.

The march, it turns out, is coming by us. We unfurl our Living River, panels of blue gauze that billow in the wind and look beautiful unfurling behind us. We have banners and flags so we watch the contingents go by, steelworkers with their own river of blue flags, the Root Cause folks, the puppets. When the giant, inflatable earth comes by, we join in. The march is beautiful and spirited, moving out into the neighborhoods and circling back again. We're chanting, "F...T...A...A...we say no! Don't privatize the water, let the river flow!"

But the cops have held back some of the union busses. Something like 2000 people are prevented from getting to the rally or the march. And they don't allow the march to come near the fence, in spite of the permit and the agreement they've made with the unions.

We get back to the entrance to the rally, near the fence, and go sit down on the grass to relax. Another group leads a march back to the fence, and several hundred people follow. Andy and I go over to see what's going on. Something is happening on one side of the crowd, but so many media are clustered there we can't see what. We are standing between the crowd and the police, very close.

"Why are we doing this?" we ask each other. "Either we intuitively feel that there's something useful we can do," I say, "or we're just stupid." Actually I'm asking myself the questions I do ask before placing myself in a dangerous situation: "Am I truly called to do this?" "Is there anything effective I can do?" "Am I the one who can do something here?"

A reporter comes up to me. "Why are you here?" he asks, pointing to our close proximity to the cops. I'm not sure what

to tell him. I say that if there's violence, sometimes I can deescalate it, then realize I should have been clearer, said, "police violence" which is the only kind I've experienced today. "Isn't this provocative?" he asks, motioning to his cameraman to film how close we are. "Where we really want to be is over there, at the conference," I say. "So this is a compromise."

A cop comes out with a bullhorn and announces, "This demonstration will be allowed as long as it's peaceful, but if there's any violence, it will be stopped." He says this twice. I am surprised--I've never before seen them announce that a rally is legal, only illegal. And then, just down the line where the media are gathered, the cops attack. They start pushing and shoving into people with their batons.

Andy and I stand next to each other. We're part of a line that is holding back the cops, trying to give others a chance to move away. We're falling back, but slowly. The cop in front of me starts shoving me with his baton, jabbing it into my chest. "You don't need to do that," I'm telling him. "We're moving back." He is truly snarling. Andy has turned around and the cop starts beating him on the back and shoulders. "Why are you doing that?" I'm asking. "You really don't need to do that." He shoves the baton in my face, then drops it again. We hear a shot and our eyes start to sting. Tear gas. The line of cops stop and we move away, back up to the grass to find the rest of the cluster.

Lisa moves us across the street, so we'll be by an escape route if the cops attack. Which they do, surging forward and driving the crowd ahead. People start to panic and run, but others yell "Walk, Walk," and the crowd slows and walks. We head off Biscayne down Third. Behind us tear gas canisters are landing and young men are throwing them back at the cops. Some begin throwing rocks. We keep the cluster together, singing, "Hold on, hold on, hold the vision that's being born." More tear gas--and then out of nowhere there comes a burst, an absolute roar of wind like the breath of Oya herself blowing it straight back. We all stop for a moment, stunned by the pure magic of it--in the midst of the brutal onslaught the elements themselves are declaring solidarity and coming to our aid. We echo Oya's roar with an astonished cry of our own, raising our hands high to feel the power. Praise the wind!

The cops push us back up to North Miami. A group starts building a barricade behind us. Now the cops have the fight they've been trying to provoke all day. The crowd splits, some heading up toward the Convergence Center, others staying on Third. We stay because our cars are nearby, and end up

walking through the ghetto, where we have not wanted to be for fear of bringing the heat into the community. Nevertheless everyone we pass is friendly, giving us a thumbs up or a smile. Some people shuttle back to our houses in cars, and some of us walk, in the glorious sunset.

Just as we arrive at the house, Lisa gets a call. The police are raiding the Convergence Center. Without saying a word, Charles, Juniper, and I turn around and the four of us head back up there. When we arrive, the police are gone. They haven't raided it, just menaced it and arrested people coming and going. This action has truly seen some of the most blatant abuses of police power I've encountered in a long time. People are holding a panicked meeting at the Convergence Center to decide on a plan for a raid. Spokescouncil has been moved to the Unitarian Church which is unfortunately far away. I suggest we move it back, now that the cops don't appear to be attacking us, that if they control our interior space through fear it is worse than what they do to us in the body. People agree. Lisa, Charles, and I head back to the Pagan house for a short rest. On the way, I get a call from Holly, who has been shot in the breast with a rubber bullet. She's being released from the hospital, and Tom volunteers to go pick her up

We have a good meeting, make plans for the next day. I am numb and shell-shocked, too tired when we get back to write anything more than a short note to let everyone know we are all right. But we're not all right. We've been pepper sprayed, tear gassed, hit by rubber bullets. Eileen of the Green Bloc has been beaten by the cops, Steven was clubbed to the ground. I don't find out until later that Abby, of the sweet, sweet face and gentle brown eyes and wild dreadlocks, the lovely young gardener and permaculture teacher, has been jumped on by cops on her way back to her hotel, thrown to the ground and badly beaten. We've seen peaceful crowds repeatedly attacked by police.

Why am I here? Perhaps because there is a strange intimacy, standing face to face with a snarling man who is angry and armed and who has the backing of all the state's power, should he wish to hurt you. Sometimes, many times, those eyes will soften, even just slightly, and become human. Sometimes they remain glazed and hard. And maybe I'm here because I feel drawn to stare deeply into that soulless hell, to know what we are facing even if I can't deflect it. All day I've been in the zone of deadly calm, the place you go beyond fear or rage or grief, where you just deal with what's happening and don't try to comprehend why a brutal man would beat a lovely young

woman to the ground. But underneath, simmering just below the surface, is a rage that dwarfs the whirlwind.

These updates are posted at:

www.starhawk.org

www.utne.com

[BACK to Miami Journals index page](#)

Copyright (c) 2003 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.

Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* and eight other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the RANT trainer's collective, www.rantcollective.org that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues. To get her periodic posts of her writings, email Starhawk-subscribe@lists.riseup.net and put 'subscribe' in the subject heading. If you're on that list and don't want any more of these writings, email Starhawk-unsubscribe@lists.riseup.net and put 'unsubscribe' in the subject heading.