

Cancun Journal #9: Wednesday, 9/3/03

Displaced Iguanas

Well, I think I'm done for the day early last night but get nabbed on my way back from dinner by Lisa to help write a couple of paragraphs on direct action for a joint handbook being put out by all the organizing groups, including those who are extremely nervous about direct action or actively opposed to it. A delicate mission, with three of us trying to work on it at the Convergence Center while others are gathering for a late night scouting mission out on the island that is probably going to involve tequila at some point. They are in an exuberant mood and it's hard to concentrate on the nuances of a political message when surrounded by exuberance, so we go home and finish there.

Get up early this morning for our 9 a.m. eco-team meeting. We trek down to the Convergence Center instead of meeting at the house so that we can be accessible to anyone who isn't at the house, but they do not show up and we are irritated, could have stayed home and met leisurely over breakfast. We are all a bit on edge. My anxiety about getting everything done is making me pushy and it comes off patronizing and then feelings get hurt, but Abby and Erik and I know each other so well and truly love each other so much that it's not hard to resolve. And the work is underway--still gathering tools today and doing redesign and beginning this afternoon to put things together.

Lisa and I work on a funding letter. We've raised around \$20,000 so far, which has gone to busses and transport and renting the convergence space and getting housing. We still need money for a few basics--like food, water, and medical supplies--around \$8000 altogether. The Seattle blockade in 1999 had a budget of closer to \$100,000, according to one of my friends who helped organize it. We're doing this on a shoestring. (And so, dear reader, you'll find information at the bottom of this on how to send money, should you be so inclined.)

Then the day whizzes by in a whirl of meetings and technical frustrations, summed up in the moment my phone went dead because I had used up the money in its card while on the phone to my tech support in the US to find out why my email isn't downloading. But on the other hand, I had a very satisfying moment plunging out the stopped-up toilet. It's one of the things I'm good at, thanks to my ex-husband Eddie the plumber who taught me the technique, and it felt good to solve an actual, real-life problem.

We are making more progress on action ideas. When we break into small groups this time, our group, which includes the students from Mexico City, decides to conduct its meeting in Spanish, with translation only as needed for the gringos. It works well and creates a much more exciting atmosphere. Lisa communicates with such expressive body language and such a perfect mix of minimal English and Spanish that we are all laughing--everyone understands perfectly and no one knows what language to translate into. The actions are hard to plan because, of course, there is so much information we don't know. Sounds like a job for divination, I think, and ask if everyone is comfortable if we do a quick Tarot reading. They nod, and I pass the Tarot cards around as we talk, and everyone shuffles. I lay out a simple, three card reading about our ultimate plan. They all come out right-side up, which is a strong "yes." They are, for those of you interested in such things, the eight of cups, a hunched figure heading out into the mountains under a yellow moon, the King of Swords, and Justice. I take them to mean that we should look to nature for help, that we will meet major police and military power (it doesn't take a psychic to predict that!), but that the powers of Justice will prevail.

The reading gives us all an emotional boost. It reflects a stronger "yes" than I actually feel--what I actually feel about this or any of our plans is a deep squirrely feeling in the pit of my stomach. The police presence is growing. So far they are not actively harassing people, but they are watching. A group of us go out to eat after the meeting, thinking we would continue our discussion over food. We take a table at our favorite little food stand in the Parque de Palapas, where they serve a full lunch with soup, a main dish, horchata and dessert for about \$2, but a very suspicious looking man parks himself on a stool next to us. Peyote, one of the students from Mexico City, points him out and nudges us. He has a grim face and really looks like he walked straight out of Central Casting for Undercover Cops. So instead we talk about past actions. I'm

watching the churro maker behind us squeeze dough through a hand-cranked press into long, ridged snakes that he deep-fries in a well in his stand. Tristan is telling amusing stories about the G-8 at Evian. Felicidad and I are sharing an unspoken and possibly politically problematic appreciation of the sheer sex appeal of so many of these activists who surround us. In my case it's more of a generalized, aesthetic appreciation, as I can't really lust after someone when I'm old enough to be their mother, possibly even grandmother. But Felicidad, despite her considerable organizing skills and general level-headedness, is only nineteen, and very appealing herself, flouncing out the door in a white camisole and much-ruffled skirt as I'm writing this.

Back at the Convergence Center, our eco-team has returned from a day of gathering materials and redesigning the site. The municipality's bulldozers are scraping the ground bare, removing even the giant boulders that cannot possibly be carried in a riot but which would make such wonderful gardens and great habitat. Erik describes sadly how dozens of displaced iguanas, their homes destroyed in this "cleanup," are running frantically around the bleak landscape, looking for somewhere to hide.

The team has acquired some 55-gallon drums, but they prove to be full of paint thinner. Juniper, our genuine, accredited environmental engineer, assures us that we can clean them well enough for a graywater system to handle whatever residue exists, so we carefully pour out what is left and then discuss the problem of cutting them. If fumes are trapped inside, they could ignite and explode, which would have bad repercussions personally and politically. The team carefully washes them out and then Scotty applies the circular saw, with Coco bravely sitting on the barrel to stabilize it while sparks fly. I am not having a good feeling about this, and Juniper is starting to wonder how we will ever convince the police that we are actually constructing a graywater system, not a nefarious weapon.

The evening's assembly is long and hot. A whole group of local youth has come in to join us, and so we shift into meetings that are bilingual, conducted in both English and Spanish, instead of in one language with someone quietly translating the other for a small group. It's a much more equal dynamic, but everything takes twice as long. The young woman who has come with the group sits through the whole meeting with the blank expression of someone who has suspended judgment and is not convinced yet of our intentions, but when we finally get a chance to talk

about the EcoVillage, her face lights up and she asks me for information about how to join in the project.

After the meeting Lisa and Juniper and I go out to the airport to pick up two of our friends. There are Presidential Police stationed at the turnoff, and soldiers guarding the airport.

Nevertheless, one of our buddies who shall remain nameless flew in earlier in the day carrying a gas mask and climbing gear, with no problems. We drive back through the hotel zone, where they are erecting metal barricades along the sides of the roads, building huge metal staircases and bridges so that pedestrians can cross the road without ever getting on it, and building a concrete wall around the Convention Center. We also hear that they are closing all the schools in Cancun for the duration of the meeting. Sometimes I wish we were truly as dangerous as they think we are. Sometimes I think we are far more dangerous than they can possibly imagine, but in a completely different way. Mostly I'm thinking about those poor, displaced, iguanas, the latest addition to the hundreds of millions displaced and made refugees by the economic and political forces we're fighting against. If we can create any sort of garden on that stripped ground, it will be a symbolic act of real power, an act of magic.

We need:

\$1000 for Medical -- to rent the clinic, buy supplies and get a phone.

\$1000 for copies -- it's really expensive -- but we need to copy leaflets for the neighborhoods, maps, legal handbooks.

\$ 1,000 for water for the convergence and street. It is about \$1.60 for a 5 gallon jug. We are going through about 5 jugs a day in the convergence space and we are still a small number of the people coming.

\$ 700 for IMC Street Communications, for bikes, etc.

\$500 for supplies for the Convergence and Art space.

\$500 for Media for fax blast, phone and internet.

\$2500 to rent a school near the encampment that has 7 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms which can house up to 50 people.

\$500 for Food Not Bombs, to get a place with a kitchen and get food. (They have already raised \$500.)

So we are looking for about \$8000 more dollars.

We have already raised about \$20,000--we have rented a great Convergence space, secured sleeping places for about 80 people, gotten 3 busses for students and money for the campesinos, some phones, art supplies, and we have raised money to set up the Eco-Village.

To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check to:
Daughters/Sisters Project
(Make check out to Daughters/Sisters, earmark it RANT)
PO Box 4492
Rolling Bay, WA 98061
EIN: 91-188-5041A

All non-tax deductible contributions can be sent directly to:
RANT, 1405 Hillmont St. Austin, TX 78704

Please specify in the memo line how you want your money used for the WTO Ministerial mobilization, i.e.: busses, permaculture project, convergence space, general

-- *Starhawk*

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