

## Be the Wind: On the Upcoming Elections

by Starhawk

As you read this, a mother in Iraq is newly wailing over the body of a dead child. A nineteen year old kid who used to be the star of his basketball team is being sent home without legs. A father in Guantanamo hasn't seen his kids, or sunlight, for three years. Another chunk breaks off the polar ice caps and the heat trapped by greenhouse gases churns the atmosphere into new swirls of turbulence like those that unleashed four hurricanes in one season in the Caribbean. As I type this sentence, another worker loses her union job, another child is shot in Palestine, another farmer somewhere drinks pesticides in despair.

The stakes are really high right now. And the future is very unclear. It seems likely the outcome of the elections will be a cliff hanger until the very end. Bush could win. Kerry could win. Bush could try to manipulate, steal, or subvert the outcome. His forces could manufacture a last-minute surprise—unearth Bin Laden, say, or stage a terrorist attack. They could even try to postpone or cancel elections altogether. After all, this particular gang of thugs has for decades plotted, planned, schemed, manipulated and murdered to consolidate their power—why should they let it go for anything as simple as a fair election?

I don't know when I've seen so many people so deeply afraid, staring into the future like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck. Will it run us down? Do we try to deflect its path, or run away?

I'm hearing two schools of thought among progressives. Some are heading to swing states to help get out the vote. Others are saying, 'Why vote?' when both candidates are taking such similar positions on the war, and serve the same corporate interests.

I'm a direct action kind of gal, and I don't generally put a lot of energy into electoral politics. But I believe that we need to vote. We need to do all we can to keep the neocons behind Bush from further consolidating their power.

Voting is not the most empowering of political acts -- but it's the one that most people across the political spectrum take part in. When I stand in line to vote in my neighborhood, I stand in a crowd that is more diverse than almost any other political activity I take part in. Working class, middle class, old, young, Euro/African/Asian /Latino Americans—everyone is there. I don't see how we can claim to speak to the communities who are most impacted by the neocons policies, most disenfranchised, most utterly screwed, if we disdain this simplest, most basic of political acts. How do we speak to the parents of kids whose schools are lacking books and desks and supplies if we can't get out to vote for school bonds? In California, we have a chance to vote for Proposition 66, which would end the worst abuses of our vicious three-strike

law that now condemns mostly black and brown offenders to life sentences for stealing a few bucks worth of groceries. If you can't be bothered to vote for that, don't claim to be an ally of communities of color. In every area, there are crucial issues on the ballot that go far beyond just the choice of presidential candidate -- whether they are initiatives to ban the growing of GMO crops that we need to pass, or initiatives to ban gay marriage that we need to defeat.

What about voting for Nader, or the Green Party? I've voted for Nader many times. I'm registered Green Party. I strongly support Green Party candidates in local and regional elections. I've seen what a Green Mayor and City Council can do in Sebastopol, where they have banned the use of pesticides on city property, planted a permaculture garden outside the Police Station, are working on a community garden and skateboard park. I think that's one way we can build a Green Party or other third party as a counterforce that might pull our national dialogue to the left—from the bottom up, in places where we can win and build alternatives as examples of what is possible. I thought Nader was right to run last time, to attempt to give voice to issues that other candidates weren't talking about, to start to build a new base. But this time, I see his decisions as undermining that base. If by some miracle a candidate with his policies got elected, she'd need to be a great coalition builder, with a brilliant sense of how to win over, influence, charm, and yes, and occasionally arm-twist both allies and enemies -- and I don't see that in Nader or the Greens nationally at this time.

I've heard it said that "the lesser of two evils is still an evil." Kerry does not perfectly represent my vision for the world, or the policies I would like to see implemented. I don't expect that any candidate for President will, under the current system which is so driven by money and corporate influence. But Kerry does represent change, a refusal to give the current evil a mandate. And here let me quote my brother, Mark Simos, who wrote to me saying:

"I'm choosing to focus on these messages: that voting for change right now will send the most powerful possible message to the world, that Americans still have a conscience; that we are not completely controlled by our media spinmeisters; that the mechanisms of democracy are, somehow, still intact if compromised on all sides; that we hold our leaders accountable for the consequences of their policies, even if they themselves refuse to do so; that we are capable of getting out of denial about realities on the ground, instead of "changing the facts to suit our position"; and that we are fundamentally committed to finding more just ways of exercising leadership in the post 9/11 world. In other words, the act of change itself will open doors to new alternatives hard to envision right now.'

But won't things get so bad if Bush gets in again that people will finally wake up and make the revolution? Oh, if you believe that you weren't around or have forgotten the same arguments in '68 and '72 and '80 and '84 and on and on. What actually happens when the right wing triumphs is that progressives become demoralized, the economic elite gains and keeps more power, the national dialogue shifts further away from progressive goals, and things get worse. Maybe it's hard to imagine that things can get worse than they are, but I've been to Palestine and I'm telling you, they can get a whole lot worse. And I believe that in many important ways Kerry will be significantly better than Bush. On issues of women's rights and on the environment, there's a world of

difference between them. Kerry has fought to prevent Bush from rolling back clean air and water standards. He supports a shift to renewable energy sources, and is aware of the global warming crisis. He's a strong supporter of women's right to choose, and is pledged to nominate judges to the Federal bench who will support our liberties.

At minimum, he seems to inhabit roughly the same reality I do, in which Iraq is a mess, the economy is a disaster, and people all over the world are suffering. Listening to Bush in the debates, I began to wonder if he is actually the president of some other country, where foreign wars are going well, the economy is booming, African American children are dutifully doing their homework in the homes their parents own and getting the test scores they need to go on to college, and the environment is something invented by liberals to hamper business. That would explain a lot, since I know he wasn't actually elected president of this one. For the American people to ratify the Bush policies of greed, lies, empire and war, or to let them continue out of apathy or misguided principle, would be to contribute to crimes against humanity. I have no illusions that Kerry will be a beacon of pacifism and revolution, but at least he knows that Iraq is a disaster, that nuclear proliferation is a danger, that jobs are evaporating, and that the environment actually exists and has some bearing on our quality of life. And Kerry windsurfs. That's a quality I want in a president, because we need to be the wind.

We need to be the force that politicians have to respond to. It's useless complaining about Kerry's positions or about how frustrating it is to not have a viable candidate that can really raise the issues of the war and globalization. We need to raise those issues, as we have been, and continue to raise them so strongly and loudly that they cannot be ignored. Regardless of who is elected, we need to build the base and the movement that can shift the political currents away from the right-wing shoals of empire back to the harbor of real democracy.

If Bush wins the election or steals it, if there is fraud or attempts to disrupt the process, we can't sit back this time with that paralyzed-rabbit-stare. We need to be organized and prepared to hit the streets and raise such a ruckus that the fraud cannot be ratified. We can complain all we want about Gore and the Democrats rolling over and playing dead last time—but how many of us were in the streets urging them on to fight? This time, we need to be ready. So at the bottom of this email you'll find a call from the NO STOLEN ELECTIONS campaign, and a pledge you can sign to participate in protests including nonviolent civil disobedience if fraud occurs. I've signed it: I hope you will too.

If Kerry wins, we also need to be prepared to hit the streets, to celebrate but also to agitate, to let him know that we actually do want health care and good schools, taxes on the rich and the corporations, and end to the murderous mess in Iraq and our civil liberties back. Oh yes, and that small problem of the basic life support systems of the planet heading toward collapse—could we begin to address that? In San Francisco, we have demonstrations planned for November 3, regardless of who wins, calling for Healthcare, not Warfare—beginning with a 9 AM rally at Justin Herman Plaza, a march through the Tenderloin district and a convergence at noon at the Federal Building. It's part of an overall national campaign, Beyond Voting, [www.beyondvoting.org](http://www.beyondvoting.org). You can check the website to find out what's planned in your area, or plan an action of your

own.

And whoever wins, we need to actually build the world we want to live in, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood. That's a longterm project, and I won't outline the full program here. But here's what I intend to do on November 2:

My house is across the street from our neighborhood polling place. We're going to set up a free café in our garage, and invite the neighbors to stop by, before or after voting. For some free coffee, and some homegrown apple pie, and some conversation about what our neighborhood wants and needs. Maybe we'll set up a mini Really Free Market, and give stuff away. Give out sidewalk chalk to the kids and let them draw their visions on the street. It's a small action, but any time we start to reach out across the barriers that keep us isolated and build community, we undermine the empire.

A year ago, my friends and I were blockading and dancing outside the walls of the World Trade Organization's collapsing Ministerial, chanting in Spanish, "We are the wind that blows the Empire down."

We need to be that wind.

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Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* and nine other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. Her latest book, *The Earth Path*, has just been published by HarperSanFrancisco. For details of her upcoming events, see her [schedule page](#).

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## **NO STOLEN ELECTIONS!**

[www.Nov3.US](http://www.Nov3.US)

Sisters & Brothers,

We all remember the votes that were never counted in Florida 2000. While we are all working hard for a positive outcome on November 2nd, we also have to be prepared for a repeat of a 2000 stolen election. Below is a pledge for people to sign, supporting efforts to mobilize and protect the vote on November 2nd and making a commitment to protest starting on November 3rd in the case of a fraudulent vote count. By signing this pledge, you will be joining with thousands of others in the November 3rd Urgent Response Network. Please sign the pledge at [www.Nov3.US](http://www.Nov3.US) and pass it around far and wide.

We are setting up a Fair Elections Advisory Council made up of U.S. and international elections experts who will give us their assessment on election day itself. If they find

significant fraud, we will activate the Urgent Response Network on or immediately after November 3rd, calling on people everywhere to engage in protest, including non-violent civil disobedience, in front of their local federal buildings and other appropriate places.

We will also be asking those who can to converge in the states where the most serious fraud occurred, as well as in Washington DC.

In addition to signing the pledge, please work with other people and groups in your area to protect the vote on November 2nd and to build the Urgent Response Network. Pick a venue for your local protest in the case that the Urgent Response Network is activated, and list the time and place on the website at [www.Nov3.US](http://www.Nov3.US) We also recommend that you set up a place to jointly watch the election results on November 2nd.

Let us commit ourselves to making sure that this time around, the person who occupies the White House is the one who won the election.

### **No Stolen Election Pledge of Action:**

"I remember the stolen presidential election of 2000 and I am willing to take action in 2004 if the election is stolen again. I support efforts to protect the right to vote leading up to and on Election Day, November 2nd. If that right is systematically violated, I pledge to join nationwide protests starting on November 3rd, either in my community, in the states where the fraud occurred, or in Washington DC."

**Please sign the pledge now** at [www.Nov3.US](http://www.Nov3.US)

Initial Signatories:

Stewart Acuff, Organizing Director, AFL-CIO  
Fred Azcarate, Jobs with Justice  
Patrick Barrett, RadFest: Midwest Social Forum  
Brian Benford, Madison Common Council  
Medea Benjamin, CodePink  
Adrienne Maree Brown, League of Pissed Off Voters  
Mike Brune, Executive Director, Rainforest Action Network  
Dennis Brutus, poet  
Andrea Buffa, Global Exchange  
Linda Burnham, Women of Color Resource Center  
Leslie Cagan, United for Peace and Justice  
John Cavanagh, Institute for Policy Studies  
David Cobb, Green Presidential Nominee  
Steve B. Cobble, political strategist  
Rev. James Demus, III, Director, NAACP, Chicago Southside  
Charlie Derber, Professor of Sociology, Boston College  
Karen Dolan, Institute for Policy Studies & Cities for Peace  
Theresa El-Amin, Southern Anti-Racism Network (SARN)  
Daniel Ellsberg, author  
Larry Fahn, President, Sierra Club  
Lisa Fithian, Root Activist Network of Trainers  
Arun Gandhi, M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence  
Ed Garvey, Fighting Bob Fest

Greg Gerritt, Executive Director, Friends of the Moshassuck  
Ted Glick, National Coordinator, IPPN  
Jim Goodman, Family Farm Defenders  
Rev. Graylan Hagler, Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice  
Jody Grage Haug, Green Peace Action (GPAX)  
Andy Heidt, Madison Common Council  
Dolores Huerta, United Farm Workers  
Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rainbow/PUSH  
Reverend James Lawson, civil rights leader  
Natalie Johnson Lee, Minneapolis City Council  
Van Jones, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
Rabbi Michael Lerner, Tikkun  
Pete Karas, Racine Common Council  
Brenda Konkel, President, Madison Common Council  
Doug La Follette, Wisconsin Secretary of State  
Barbara Lubin, Middle East Children's Alliance  
Ben Manski, Foundation for the Democratic Revolution  
Jessica Marshall, National Youth and Student Peace Coalition  
Elizabeth Martinez, Institute for Multiracial Justice  
Mike McCabe, Wisconsin Democracy Campaign  
Robert McChesney, Free Press  
Holly Near, singer-songwriter  
Maya O'Connor, Labor Greens Network  
Jamala Rogers, Organization for Black Struggle, St. Louis  
Rebecca Rotzler, Alder, New Paltz  
Marc Sanson, Co-Chair, Green Party of the United States  
Renee Saucedo, La Raza Centro Legal  
John Sellers, Ruckus Society  
Charles Shaw, Newtopia Magazine  
Jane Slaughter, Labor Notes  
Eleanor Smeal, Feminist Majority  
Damu Smith, founder, Black Voices for Peace  
Starhawk, activist and writer  
Ajita Talwalker, United States Students Association  
Chuck Turner, Boston City Council  
Chris Vaeth, This Time We're Watching  
Jason West, Mayor, New Patlz, New York  
Bob Wing, War Times  
Dean Zimmerman, Minneapolis City Council  
Howard Zinn, historian

Please join us by signing the pledge now at [www.Nov3.US](http://www.Nov3.US)