

Ride Out to Meet Them: Some Post-Election Thoughts

by Starhawk

On my way to New York last summer to help organize protests against the Republican National Convention, I found myself on a plane watching *Lord of the Rings* over and over again. One thing struck me: every time the heroes were in deep trouble, surrounded, outnumbered, trying desperately to hold off ten thousand orcs and all the forces of evil, their leader Aragorn would turn to the others and say, "Let's ride out to meet them!" Let's take the offensive, go forward courageously instead of cowering in fear, and meet the enemy on our terms.

While the movie, and the books, can rightly be critiqued for their gender and racial stereotypes, I think a little of that heroic spirit is what we need now, as the forces of destruction close ranks around us, smirking to boot. In the last month, since the election, I've been on the road touring with my new book, *The Earth Path*, speaking to groups just about every night, listening to the deep despair that has settled over progressives across the land. I see the stricken faces and hear people asking what to do, where to go? Can't we just curl up under the covers and moan for a while, or move to Canada? Where do we flee to when there's nowhere to go?

Maybe we need to retreat, moan, and regroup—for a while, but not for long.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, this is a crucial time to ride out and meet the onslaught head-on, not to run away. In doing so, we should not buy into the media propaganda that the left is somehow 'out of touch' with Real America. Our strength is precisely that we are in touch with realities the neocons refuse to acknowledge or face, and reality eventually catches up with even the most entrenched power. So here are some key fronts that we can advance upon:

Election Fraud and Voter Repression: It becomes clearer and clearer that there are massive, unexplained discrepancies between exit polls (historically quite accurate and used in many countries—Ukraine, for example-- to verify election results) and vote counts, too many black box machines that leave no paper trail, too many stories of ballots disappearing, of counts in locked rooms from which observers are excluded.

And there are the thousands of out front, obvious attempts to intimidate, confuse and discourage voters from targeted groups—communities of color and students. Absentee ballots that disappeared, the 'challengers' inside polling places, the lack of machines in key areas leading to lines hours long, the clearly partisan election officials: all of this needs to be challenged. We can actively pressure the mainstream media to start covering these scandals. They are reluctant to do so—but organize even a small demonstration on their doorstep and you can suddenly find yourself on the evening news. And we can pressure our Democratic representatives to step up and demand a full Congressional investigation.

In waging this fight, we should not define victory as overturning the election results.

This is a for the future, to assure that elections cannot be stolen, that at least the small aspect of democracy that voting represents is open to all. And this is a battle to reframe the election, to make clear that Bush and Co. did not win because they suddenly have a huge mandate for their policies, but squeaked by on a narrow margin they achieved through lying, cheating and outright fraud. Success is the chipping away of their legitimacy, laying the groundwork for a possible new Watergate. We need to wage a long term campaign not just to remove the current neocons from power but to utterly discredit their philosophies and policies. Since 'morals' are being put forward as a rationale for right-wing success, we need to put this forward also in moral terms: Stealing elections is morally wrong. Intimidating voters, the whole toolbox of dirty tricks and intimidation, T.V. ads that lie, misrepresentation of issues and facts—these are all moral issues, whatever your religion or lack thereof.

The War in Iraq: Since we're talking about morals, what about closing hospitals, killing civilians, denying the Red Cross access to provide aid to the wounded, physical and psychological torture of prisoners? All of these are moral issues, and against international law as well.

Tom Hayden, in a recent article for AlterNet, suggests that we can bring an end to the war by denying funding, troops, alliances and political standing to the Bush administration. We know the war is not going to go well—and we need neither prophets nor the now-purged CIA to tell us so. Our long term strategy, again, is to discredit the whole idea of pre-emptive war, of Empire building through military adventurism, of the US as the global bully superpower commandeering the resources of the rest of the world. We can do this by constantly revealing the truth of the war's human, economic and environmental costs, by supporting the veterans who resist the war and those who return home broken and wounded to face inadequate medical, psychological and economic resources.

The Environment: What else do we know that Bush & Co. don't know or refuse to know? We know that global warming and climate change are a reality, are happening faster than hoped for, and are scary enough to make Al Quaeda look like a bunch of kids knocking over blocks. To stabilize the climate would require not the 5% reduction of carbon emissions in the Kyoto treaty, but a 50-70% reduction. We also know that oil will become more and more expensive to extract and will eventually run out, and that our present way of life is not sustainable. Technologies exist that could help us make a transition into an oil-free economy of environmental balance and energy independence. The future belongs to those who anticipate and invest resources, energy and planning into that change. So we can push for those policies on local and state levels, work to develop those alternatives, and support efforts like the Apollo Alliance, www.apolloalliance.org, which calls for massive investment in renewable energy and sustainable technologies to create good jobs in economically depressed communities and exciting opportunities for youth.

These are just a few of the ways we can move forward. The characters currently controlling the political scene are more frightening than all the trolls and monsters of fairy tales, and we are not mythic heroes, alas. If we ride into the face of all the forces ranged against us, no white wizard on a shining horse will appear to save the day. But

the momentum of courageous action will call forth all those energies, within and around us, that can shift fate, generate surprises, kindle hope, and bring about change.

Some good links re election issues:

www.blackboxvoting.org

www.codepink4peace.org

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