

## RNC Update Number 11: Remember Me to Herald Square

by Starhawk

The convention is over, the delegates heading home, all but one or two of the demonstrators out of jail. I've been in jail myself, and out again, too busy or exhausted to write until now. So let me back up, and catch up.

I spent the day in a state of tension that is rare for me, with a knot deep in my stomach and an overriding feeling of doom. We read the Tarot cards, got cheerful things like Death and the Ten of Swords: a corpse with ten swords embedded in her back. And yet I was not particularly afraid of the police, who had not been being excessively brutal. In the midst of our last strategy and coordination meeting, I looked up at the green leaves shimmering on the trees and something shifted. I realized that what I'm afraid of is failure, not being able to pull off what we want to do in this action. Every rational and psychic sense was telling me that we were not going to be able to take Herald Square and hold it. I took a deep breath and let go, trying to accept that whatever was about to take place will be what is needed. Whatever the flaws in the action, whatever the lacks in our strategic goals or tactical planning or communications, it was now just going to play out however it did.

The cluster met on the terrace at the hostel where most are staying. We were tearing up cloth into ribbons and passing out stacks of flyers and munching on pizza. I knew I should eat but I was too tense to eat much. There's a particular grim feeling you get when you are already tired past the point of exhaustion and know that you are looking forward to a long ordeal of discomfort and lack of sleep. We were getting text messages telling us that the War Resisters' League funeral march had been stopped at Ground Zero, with part of it surrounded and arrested. It seemed the police were not going to allow much to happen in the city tonight.

We finally circled up, grounded, and sang. I told the cluster honestly that I thought we were going to jail, and I hated that, but my biggest fear was disappointing them, that the experience would be hard and disempowering. But they all assured me that they were just fine, that whatever happened, they were glad to be here, learning a lot, and knew they were in the right place at the right time. I just couldn't help but think about that scene in Lord of the Rings toward the end where the knights and elves and all the forces of good go off in a ridiculously small band to challenge the hundreds of thousands of orcs and monsters in Mordor itself. And Gimli, the macho little dwarf, looks up and says. "Certainty of death...small chance of success...what are we waiting for?"

In that spirit, Delylah and I buddied up and headed out. We were all in small groups of twos and threes, to make it easier to get into the area without being stopped. I had my drum in a black bag, and my action gear hidden. Delylah, however, is a medic who was

carrying a big fanny pack of supplies and water bottles, wearing brown cargo pants with a dozen useful pockets and a leather cowboy hat, and she did not look like your average New Yorker coming home from work. We met a couple other women from our cluster, and shared a cab, getting dropped off a few blocks away from Herald Square, on the east side. The streets were open, and we walked in together without being stopped.

Herald Square was already choked with people at twenty to six, plenty of people coming home from work and plenty of protestors, some dressed inconspicuously, some with signs and banners. The police were already stationed in the street, controlling the space and keeping people penned into the corners with the orange netting they've been using to round people up and arrest them. They were letting people cross the street, and each time they did people burst forth like a pent-up river breaking a dam, and streamed across the intersection. Herald Square was certainly a challenging location tactically, as all the main Avenues leading out are lined with permanent metal railings, Channel Four had set up its Convention coverage from a platform in the Square itself, and it commands an intersection of two converging north-south avenues which were the westernmost routes open to traffic, as Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Avenues were closed.

Delylah and I decided to flow along with the pedestrian movement. for a while, to get a feel for the space. Now that we were here, and the action had begun, I was enjoying myself tremendously. The energy was high and I kept seeing more and more protestors pouring into the space. Whatever happened, we had brought lots and lots of people into the streets at the gates of the convention, and Lady Liberty was on the prowl.

We made our way across 6th Avenue and Broadway to the southwest corner of the square, came back and stood on the island in the center for a long time. That seemed to us the best place from which to move into the street. Unfortunately, the police also realized suddenly that it was a great launching spot, and moved us out. We had decided to move back the action time to 7:07, to give more people a chance to arrive—in retrospect we should have timed it for ten minutes before instead of after, because at 7 sharp the police presence stepped up sharply. We had purchased and distributed about fifty bright-colored stadium horns, and at seven they all blew in a loud trumpeting cry, but we held back.

We ran into Lisa, Juniper and Charles, and together made our way back to the sidewalk on the west side, to decide what to do. The problem with all arriving separately was that, with the huge crowds, it was impossible to gather our people together, or even see or hear each other. We were hampered by our own success. But in planning, with only a few groups sending representatives to spokescouncil or attending meetings, it had been impossible to know whether we would have dozens in the Square or thousands. v Our fallback plan, if Herald Square were blocked, was to move down a block to 33rd St., which was the street that led in directly to Madison Square Garden.

The police presence down there was much lighter. We regrouped on the sidewalk there, wondering how to convey to others that we were going to go for that intersection. Our vision all along had been that some group would run out and take the street, hoping that others would be able to swarm in in numbers enough to hold it. We

were just considering if we should be the ones to do it, when across the way we saw some of our friends from the Bay Area affinity group Code Orange rush out into the road, sit down, and link up. The traffic stopped.

We ran out into the stalled intersection. Lisa whipped out an altar cloth and laid it in the street, began pouring out the seeds we had brought for an ofrenda, an offering/altar laid on the ground in the fashion we had learned from our Mexican companero/as in Cancun. Charles and Delylah and I joined her and I began pouring out seeds from the bags I had stashed in my pockets, rice and lentils and wheat. I looked around and saw others from the cluster, Liz, Dana, Elizabeth, Deborah, Kirk and, to my dismay, my Goddess-daughter Lyra over on the other side of the Code Orange pile.

We kept pouring seeds. I had thought all along that there was some piece of magic, some symbolic act, we needed to do in the midst of the chaos and energy of the street, and I had imagined it as a spiral dance with a thundering cone of power, like our dance in the middle of the march with the dragon burning behind us. But in the end, it was very simple. I stood for one long moment, my hands full of seeds, one raised to the sky, one lowered to the earth, in perfect stillness. All around horns were blaring and people were shouting and cops were streaking toward us, but I was standing in a little cone of perfect peace and stillness, like the pregnant possibility in the heart of every seed.

Then a cop grabbed Delylah who was hovering behind me and I dove toward her to grab her back and we went down into the Code Orange pile, linking up and holding on as the cops started grabbing and pulling us away. I got grabbed, went limp, and they dragged me over to the paddy wagon, roughly but not brutally. No one in our group was being beaten, and the cops were behaving relatively decently.

They pulled me up to my feet, pulled my arms behind my back, and put plastic handcuffs on my wrists. I visualized my wrists being twice as fat as they are, and sure enough got cuffed loosely enough that I was confident I could slip them off. Then they hauled me up into the paddy wagon, which was rapidly filled with some of my dearest friends in the world. The door slammed. We were going to jail.

Donations for the action can be sent to:

RANT

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