

## RNC Update Number 3: War, Fear, and Life after Capitalism

by Starhawk

We must be pretty well organized, or we must be forgetting something, because here we are a week before the action with time to spend at the Life After Capitalism conference, thinking about ideas and theories and future visions.

So while my friends at home say, "Take care of yourself" with that worried tone in their voices, I'm actually having a great time in a very New York way, listening to smart and inspiring people talk, and having lots of interesting conversations. And in spite of the media smear campaign and the police' claim to be shadowing every dangerous anarchist in town, none of us actually seem to be being followed. Nor are the police harassing us. In Miami, activists were followed for weeks beforehand, arrested on the sidewalk while going to meetings or handing out flyers, and you could feel the surveillance like the Red Eye of Sauron, always watching. Here, the city seems quite normal, and the occasional cop we pass on the street is smiling and friendly.

Still, there's an aura of fear that people seem to have internalized. Martin, who is one of the Argentines here to present on their social revolution, remarks on it. We're talking in Spanish so I'm sometimes missing the nuances, but he's saying how you can feel the fear, coming into the city, and how it's a kind of fascism, the level of control, the media campaigns. I suggest that its internalized fascism—not the cop snatching you off the sidewalk but the cop inside your head who says, "Don't protest, don't say anything, don't do anything to upset the situation." Some people are leaving town because they are afraid of terrorist attacks and some because they are so afraid that Bush will get re-elected that they fear any sort of street disturbance will be spun toward his good.

But obviously I don't think so. Or rather, I can acknowledge the fear and the real possibility that anything we do or don't do can be spun to his advantage, but it seems clear to me that fear and timidity are what maintain his—or anyone's-oppressive power. The Democrats have been timid for years, have avoided openly challenging him, have predicated their whole strategy on what their pollsters tell them somebody else thinks.

Somewhere, somehow, we have to stop adapting to what we think someone else might think about what might possibly happen, and just do what we think is right. It's not the government or the cops on the streets or the New York Post that shut us up, it's the cops and the Karl Roves inside our head who steal our will and our voices.

In the Friday panel, Michael Albert posed the question, "What kind of movement would we have today if everyone who was touched by it from the sixties on had stayed in it?" And why didn't they—perhaps because while we talk about another form of social relations, we didn't always practice them in our organizing and our institutions. Or maybe it's just damn hard for people to get along with each other, and they can do it

for awhile, and begin great new things, and then they stop being able to do it and what they try to create falters. Or maybe we're still just learning.

Then Naomi Klein talked about what's really happening in Iraq, and brought home the seriousness of the attacks of the last weeks when I've hardly had time myself to read the papers or let the horror in. It's as if we've been fighting inside the Sistine Chapel or the Holy Mount, desecrating the sacred city of Iraq. She told tales of soldiers fighting among the graveyards, mortars ploughing corpses and bodies startled out of the earth to leap aloft in starbursts of bone and embalmed flesh. On the graves are pictures of the dead, and the shells shatter the pictures. I'm thinking of a home in Jenin that we visited after the Israeli military had shelled it, standing in the rubble and dust that filled the living room, chips of concrete all over the floor and sofa and twisted rebar pushing up out of the walls, and on the floor, a picture of the son of the house with his little children, shot full of bullet holes. The soldiers had shot the picture, his father said.

They had shot the son two months before, and now, he said, it was as if they had killed him twice.

And the soldiers in the graveyard said that sometimes, sometimes, it didn't seem right. We need to keep Iraq front and center, Naomi said, to be in active solidarity with the Iraqi resistance, who are fighting for radical like holding actual elections and getting the occupation out.

Then this morning Scotty and I gave our permaculture training. Scotty brought in a worm bin and we had people sorting the worms from their castings, getting their hands dirty amidst all the intellectual discourse. I showed slides of all our Green Bloc permaculture actions and it was so good to see images of all that green. A man came in and sat down who had what my Vietnam Veteran friend Lawrence calls the thousand-yard-stare, that faraway look as if your eyes were fixed on some horror no one else can see. He had bad teeth and his head and his words kept jerking away as if were hard to stay still, stay focused. He is a veteran, named David, just back from Iraq. In four days of fighting in Fallujah, his unit had a 67per cent casualty rate. He was lucky, he tells me, he had a good wound, shot in the ass, his hip broken, his wife was sobbing and grateful after months of snatched, hideously expensive phone calls, "I'm alive." "I'm alive." "At this moment, I'm still alive."

He used to run a business, he tells me, he's a plumber, electrician, now he can't work, his mind won't function, but he's organizing other veterans in the South Bronx and he's very excited by permaculture. They've squatted a building because many of them have no homes. They don't get paid enough overseas to support their families, and they come home to no jobs or jobs they can't do because they have lost a limb or they're in a wheelchair or they simply can't focus through the thousand yard stare. And they've got the violence locked inside them and it comes out on their wives, they're shooting up and drinking to dull the pain, and they need food. They need jobs. They need to be able to walk in the door and say, "I'm home from work."

I knew it was bad, but not this bad. I can say honestly that I did everything within my power to prevent this war, and I lost. We all lost. But now David's teeth are rotting from the toxins in the Iraqi soil left over from our depleted uranium bombs in the first Gulf War and the ones we've dropped since and the awful food the army served them

and they've closed the Veteran's Hospital and they've got to wait months and months to even see a social worker. And he, mind you, is one of the victors.

He didn't sign on to kill Iraqis, he joined the National Guard because he wanted to fight fires in California, and help people. Most of his guys are Green Card soldiers, they signed up to get a Green Card, maybe go to school, but now they're not going to school, they can't think, can't focus, can't see beyond the pain.

"And who are we now?" he asks. "I guess we're activists—what does that mean?"

There are things that are so wrong they go beyond normal anger or rage. "I'm angry," Naomi says in a soft voice that doesn't change expression. "I'm so angry." I'm angry, too. And anger is healing, and powerful. Anger is the life force responding to a threat.

Anger cuts through fear. David and his guys are not afraid. They are dying, and know it, he tells me. They are already in a hell beyond what most of us can imagine. What do we owe them, and what do we owe those on the receiving end of their firepower, the living and the dead victims of the guns placed in their hands by those who will meet in that convention hall next weekend?

The very least we owe them is to not be afraid. To not let our voices and our anger be silenced. To speak the truth. To do what we think is right.

To donate money for the groups on the ground organizing the actions at the Republican National Convention, send a check earmarked 'RNC' to:

RANT  
1405 Hillmount St.  
Austin, Texas  
78704  
U.S.A.

Or see the donation page on Starhawk's website.

For more information on permaculture/activism trainings with Starhawk, see [earthactivisttraining.org](http://earthactivisttraining.org). Spaces are still available for the upcoming sessions September 8-22, 2004, and January 16-30, 2005. Location: Northern California.

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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](#), that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.