

RNC Update Number 5: Democracy Daunted

by Starhawk

For a moment there, we had a bit of hope that democracy might reassert itself, but yesterday the judge denied United for Peace and Justice a permit to rally in Central Park. Her grounds were that the group had waited too long to file the suit, although the reason they waited was that they were in negotiations with the city and the police. In truth, it would have been better if they had never accepted the West Side Highway option, which they did in July, but they were desperate to put out a solid plan. In the end, the plans got changed anyway as the police refused all reasonable requests and efforts to make West Side Highway workable, and the community was so unhappy with the decision that UFPJ changed, filed a lawsuit, and decided to cancel the rally if they couldn't get Central Park.

Now the plan is to march back down 5th Avenue (which New Yorkers say is a victory, no one but the St. Patrick's Day Parade is ever allowed to) and go back to Union Square. All the direct action trainers in town have a plan to do trainings throughout the crowd in the open air before and after the march, to get as many people as possible prepared for whatever actions the police might take and to get some of them excited about the direct action day on the 31. And we'll see. Below is something I wrote which UFPJ may send out to their members in some version:

Attempting to diminish our presence during the Republican National Convention is part of the very agenda we are protesting: the erosion of our constitutional rights. It's part of an ongoing campaign to discredit dissent, to make protesting seem dangerous and wrong.

Come, not in spite of this campaign of intimidation, but because of it. Come because it is more dangerous to stay home and let these attempts to silence dissent succeed. For if they succeed in silencing us in September, you can be sure that they will silence us in November, and beyond.

We need you. We need you to show up for this march so that the next march and the next rally and the next attempt to exercise our constitutional rights will not be suppressed. We need you to call up five or ten or twenty of your friends who maybe weren't going to come, and say, "Please, come with me. I don't know exactly what's going to happen, but I want you to stand beside me because this is the moment our country needs us to act with courage, to stand firm in spite of all the attempts to shut us up." We need respectable professionals and scruffy youth, we need mothers and fathers and grandparents, we need nurses and farmers and doctors and carpenters and teachers, we need those of you who look clean and well dressed and those who look like nothing ever before seen on earth, to stand together on the streets of New York and say, we are united in demanding something better than this—the real democracy

our country is supposed to stand for.

I'd like to believe that all this confusion will make people madder, make more of them realize that it is really, really important to be here on the 29th, really important that this strategy not succeed. But I'm not sure it will. My ex-husband Eddie once put a bumper sticker on his truck that said, "Force—it works." (this was shortly before the ex part. Happened.) We base all our actions and our organizing on the premise that there are other kinds of powers we can mobilize that are stronger than force, but sometimes it does work, most strongly through the ways it creeps inside of us and makes us afraid and hopeless.

Yesterday I woke up in a clear, calm state of mind, thinking about fear and clarity and how much trauma people are carrying from other actions and how its affecting us. At the spokescouncil the night before, someone said she was looking for an affinity group and immediately a frantic voice was saying, "Don't ever get into an affinity group with someone you don't know—that's how cops infiltrate..." Of course, by that logic you can never trust anyone new, never grow a movement. And when you're in such deep fear all the time, you lose touch with your intuition, which actually WILL tell you if someone can be trusted or not. So I wrote this:

I woke up this morning thinking about last night's meeting and wanting to say to you all again, don't be afraid. I know that many of us are carrying trauma and deep wounds from other actions and from life itself, and I know that the cops and the media are broadcasting fear over this city like a toxic gas. It's terrible that we should have to ask ourselves and other people to brave police batons and pepper spray and jail, but the times call us to face terrible things in order to prevent worse things from happening.

And we are feeling just the passing glance of the whip. Its full force is falling in Iraq, in Palestine, in the Bronx, all around us. We know that, it's why we've chosen to bear a little of its sting in order to soften the blows and to ultimately, wrest it out of the hands of those who wield power with such brutality. And however bad the cops are on the street, what's far, far worse in the cops that get inside our heads when we let the fear control us, make us suspicious of each other, make us close up when we need to open, hide when we should stand forth proudly and unafraid. I was thinking about a Tibetan story Joanna Macy and John Seed like to tell, that in the end times when all the institutions of power have become utterly cruel and corrupt and threaten to destroy the world, they are dismantled by the Shambala warriors, who enter into the arsenals armed with only insight and compassion. They need both: clarity of insight in order to act, compassion in order to heal.

Let's dismantle the fear inside ourselves, refuse to let it control us, refuse to let it narrow our imagination and eat away our trust in each other. We are strong and courageous people. We will stand up on the streets of New York City, we'll stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and bad shit will happen, and we'll face it together and support one another and do our best to protect the most vulnerable and the targeted.

And I can't say that it'll all be all right, because it isn't always. But it is right. And if we stand together, courageous and joyful in the face of power, we will come out stronger and we will change the world.

See you in the streets, Starhawk

I thought the Shambala Warriors were a step up from the bardo and that I might be rising to a new plane of Eastern mysticism, but then I spent the day caught in the bardo of collective writing, a day-of-action flyer, a flyer for the info booth at Union Square, handouts for trainings. Finally escaped around 5 pm to get the handouts copied and to walk down to St. Mark's for a small jail solidarity training. Then I went over to a media event Warcry had organized at a club in the East village. I spoke for a short time, while a couple of guys in the audience nearly came to blows over whether we should vote for Kerry or stage a revolution. New Yorkers argue hard and yell at each other and I kind of enjoy it, it's a release for some of the tension to actually let it creep into your voice and get loud and not have to be always calm and mellow and sensitive and understanding, but occasionally to really fight for a position.

But today I'm getting out of the bardo altogether and going up to the Bronx to do some Greenbloc gardening and get my hands dirty.

Pagan cluster activities and contact info: www.pagancluster.org

A31 Day of Direct Action A31.Org

ASSERTING OUR RIGHTS--STREET SKILLS TRAININGS

The city has denied our right to rally in Central Park. Our rights to freedom of expression are everywhere under attack. Let's respond by preparing thousands of people to directly and nonviolently resist repression and confront oppressive power.

Nonviolent direct action trainers will offer a series of short trainings to share skills, tools and ideas to keep ourselves and our rights safe in the streets of NYC.

Participants will learn skills to:

- * Nonviolently protect our rights, our liberties, each other and hold our space.
- * Overcome fear, stay calm and make good decisions in threatening situations.
- * De-escalate police violence. Be prepared for the mass nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action on Tuesday August 31.

These 30-60 minute mini-trainings will be given at the march assembly beginning at 10:30am and after the march at Union Square and in the Great Lawn/Sheep's Meadow areas of Central Park. Look for the Caution tape. Please encourage your friends, family and group to participate.

If you are a community group who would like a prearranged time and place, or for more information, contact RANT 802-995-5275.

These trainings are a joint project of folks from the No RNC Clearinghouse Trainings Working Group, RANT, and War Resisters League in Conjunction with United for Peace and Justice.

Below is a list of regularly scheduling nonviolent direct action trainings. For a complete list of all trainings, see A31.Org.

Direct Action Trainings For RNC Actions

Fri 8/27, 3 - 5 pm

Street Magic, 4th Unitarian Church, 76 and Central Park West, Magical techniques for working our intention and staying safe in the streets. Workshop will cover grounding, wide awareness, anchoring, shielding, de-escalation, staying connected to the group, street spells, raising and focusing energy and spiral dancing in the streets. Contact RANT at 802-999-5275

Sat. 8/28, 9:30 - Noon

Nonviolent Direct Action Prep, St. Marks Church, Yard, 2nd Ave and 10th St. Trainings will cover scenario information and participatory exercises focused on forming affinity groups, staying calm, de-escalation, street safety, holding space and staying mobile, jail solidarity and trauma and aftercare. Contact RANT, 802-999-5275

Sat. 8/28, 10 - 2 pm

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Training, Westbeth Community Room, 55 Bethune St, enter on Bank St through Courtyard. Tools to prepare us to act using a variety of techniques that will increase communication, understanding of power, exploring hopes and fears and exercises to practices nonviolent techniques. Contact War Resisters League at 718-768-7306.

Mon 8/30, 9:30 -Noon

Nonviolent Direct Action Prep, St. Marks Church, Yard, 2nd Ave and 10th St.. Contact RANT, 802-999-5275

Mon. 8/30, 6-8 pm

Direct Action Training, 94 9th St. (between Smith St and 2nd Ave) in Brooklyn. Opportunity to explore different techniques for street safety, descalation, and more. Contact A31 trainings group, 206-333-6448

Tues 8/31, 9:30 - Noon

Nonviolent Direct Action Prep, St. Marks Church, Yard, 2nd Ave and 10th St. Contact RANT, 802-999-5275

Tues. 8/31, 10-12 pm

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Re-fresher! Westbeth Community Room, 55 Bethune St, enter on Bank St through Courtyard.. Contact War Resisters League at 718-768-7306.

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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.