

Scotland G8 Updates: The Problem is the Problem

June 8, 2005

"The problem is the solution," is a permaculture principle, but today the problem just seems like a problem. I was hoping to start out these updates for the Scotland G8 organizing with something upbeat and optimistic, but it hasn't been that kind of a day. Yesterday I was climbing a beautiful mountain above a clear, calm loch where misty blue mountains rolled away toward the horizon. Today I was sweeping pigeon shit off the floor of a warehouse in inner-city Glasgow. That was actually a good part of the day—it is just these little contrasts, after all, that keep life interesting. The frustrating part was coming back into cell phone range last night to all the messages telling us that the site for the rural convergence space had once again fallen through at the last minute. The farmer who had been very keen on the deal had backed out, unexpectedly, at the very last minute for mysterious reasons.

Erik Ohlsen, my permaculture teaching buddy, and I were climbing that mountain to recover from the effort of teaching forty-odd students a ten-day crash course in permaculture and ecological design, aimed at creating a resource pool of knowledgeable people who could turn that rural convergence site into a model ecovillage. For ten days we wallowed in compost toilets and graywater systems—okay, I'm being metaphorical here—we wallowed in discussion of these things, conceiving of ways in which problems might become solutions, waste be transformed to resources, physical structures support directly democratic social structures and people might be encouraged to wash their hands. How many shits does it take to fill a 55 gallon drum, and what is that in liters? What could you do with it afterwards? How many liters of graywater would 5000 people produce in a week, and where could it go if the clay soil doesn't drain? And just how did I become the Queen of Compost Toilets at this point in my life, anyway?

The work was hard, the rain was cold, the meandering old stone farmhouse had a beautiful simplicity in its design but three hundred years of cold and damp seemed to ooze out of the stones, and the hours were long. Usually students in our courses complain that they aren't getting enough free time. These seemed to fill every spare moment with extras—meetings to discuss policies for the convergence spaces, special sessions to further discuss techniques of bioremediating toxic soil with mushrooms, late-night screenings after post-session rituals, all night watches for nuclear convoys passing by, and not a few parties!

The students ranged from young, full time activists who live full time in treehouses in an ongoing road protest camp (while completing their Ph.Ds, in some cases) to several steady, solid women and men my age, life long peace activists. Mother tongues included English, Scots, Irish, German, Polish, Spanish, French, Swedish, and Hebrew. Just try to decipher a Swedish/Scottish accent! There was also a large contingent of dogs, intent on recruiting us to help them perfect their stick-chasing form, and several

exuberant and assertive children who often wandered in, sat down, and offered their own comments on the proceedings. In the end, we were exhausted but really, really pleased at how deeply the participants seemed to grasp the material we taught and make it their own. And it was very gratifying to see talents emerge—Brice giving a thorough and extensive presentation on alternative energy systems, quiet Beth drawing a stunning design for the convergence space,

Which is not to be—at least, not the one we were analyzing and designing for all week. As I write tonight, we're still in a cliffhanger mode—will a new site be found by the Stirling Council? The Council, executive body of the nearest town, has become very supportive of our efforts. They can see the public health and safety advantages of having one campsite, with sanitary facilities certified and provided, instead of roving bands of protestors depositing their potential resource material willy nilly throughout the hills. I spoke to one of the Council members who sounded quite genuinely interested in all the features of greywater and especially the compost toilets. So our best hope now that the Council will find us a site on land they own and control. They're looking. Cross your fingers, hold your breath, light a candle, and pray...

Overall, I'm phenomenally impressed by the level of care and thought and preparation going into every aspect of the mobilization. Dissent, the broad network of direct-action oriented groups, has been organizing up and down the land for over a year, and has managed to bring together a wide spectrum of groups. There are convergence spaces in Edinburgh and Glasgow that have been rented and will provide facilities for meetings, trainings, housing and feeding people. There are medics in training and kitchen collectives coming to cook and a two-week long training for trauma workers who will provide counseling and support for anyone suffering post traumatic stress. A network of nonviolent direct action trainers has been offering trainings for over a year in several regions of England and Scotland. A group of Pagans, the Tribe of Brigid, is coming with a geodesic dome to offer spiritual healing during the actions. Watching this all come together, I feel confident that if we do someday run the world—or rather, facilitate the world's autonomous running of itself—we'll all be fed, housed, educated, and all our physical and emotional needs will be well looked after.

And meanwhile, there's the Cre8 Summit about to happen, an effort of a coalition of local groups here in Glasgow who are resisting the building of a motorway through a low-income community. The plan is to plant a garden, designed by the community, in a vacant lot in the motorway's path, and hold a week of activities, workshops, cultural presentations and celebrations that bring alive something of the world we keep saying is possible. Everyone involved is deeply committed to strengthening the local, long term organizing around this issue and I'm very excited and honored to be involved—it's just the kind of organizing and strategy that I think can be effective, tying the local issues to the global, planting a garden in the path of the bulldozers, opposing power-over and destruction with creativity and life.

Okay, I'm going to bed now. I don't plan to send out daily updates just yet, but will write when something interesting is happening.

-- *Starhawk*

Further information at: www.dissent.org.uk. Dissent is the main group organizing actions.

Indymedia Scotland page scotland.indymedia.org

Website for alternative forums, etc www.g8alternatives.org.uk.

Donations to help support Starhawk's trainings and work can be sent to:

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