

# The Road Forward

by Starhawk

On election night, I felt an intensity of grief, rage and anguish that rivaled any of the worst nights of my life. Not so much that Kerry lost, but that millions of people could vote for Bush, apparently because they define 'morality' as preventing two people who love each other from making a legally-recognized commitment, while turning a blind eye to a regime that has invaded another country for totally invalidated reasons, lied to the American people, legitimized sexual torture, and all the rest of it. It's enough to challenge one's faith not just in Americans, but in the essential goodness of human beings. Can we apply to join another species? The wolves, perhaps?

I want to acknowledge my own grief, rage and despair. People often look to me for words of hope—and I have some—but they come only when I let myself feel just as rotten and awful as I'm sure you do. Van Jones, organizer of Books Not Bars here in the Bay Area, says we need to learn to grieve as a movement, and also to celebrate—and the two are linked. This is a moment to grieve, which means also to yell and scream and be mad as hell, to question whether life makes any sense at all, and then maybe to crawl under the covers and rest, for a bit.

Yesterday, I really didn't want to get out of bed, but I went to the demonstration anyway. I would have liked to curl up in fetal position and sleep for possibly the next four years, but I roused myself to go down to the plaza and join those hard core souls who had planned to rally and march for health care regardless of who won. I did it because I felt it is exactly what we need to do, the counterintuitive thing—advance instead of retreat, carry on, see our friends, support each other, share our grief, rage and shock. It felt good, to march down Market Street, to stop at the hotels where workers are striking and support them, to make some small, renewed effort at continuing to build the alliances we need.

All day I kept thinking about the vision I had at our Spiral Dance ritual, the certainty that we are on the good road. I remember John Kerry said, "You can be certain and still be wrong." But I also remembered the voice I heard in the vision saying over and over that the good road does not look very different, at its beginning, from any other road.

We all know that the changes we need to make are deep and systemic, that no politician's victory will make them for us. Had Kerry won, I believe we would be on an easier road. Now the way ahead will be hard and stony, but it may be clearer and there may be unexpected twists and turns ahead. And it may yet turn out to be steeper but shorter than the easier path.

Many good things happened in the last few weeks. We mobilized many, many people to become active and engaged. Many progressives set aside their own deep

disappointment with many of Kerry's positions to work hard to assure access to voting for all, and to prevent the worst abuses of the electoral process. We strengthened many of the coalitions we will need to transform power in this country and the world.

Although the media and the Republicans will try to spin this as a mandate for the worst of Bush's policies, we have built a broader, deeper, more committed opposition than we have seen in this country in a long, long time. Now we must nurture those alliances and turn opposition into a clearer, positive alternative vision—and a longterm strategy for getting there.

We need time to reflect on these last days. It is easy to rush into analysis and blame and learn the wrong things. So I want to be cautious in offering thoughts prematurely on what we should do now.

However, one lesson I take away from this last month is this: As progressives, as radicals, those of us who are far left of the left, anarchists even, cannot afford to ignore or disdain the electoral process. Not because we see it as fair or just or empowering—which it is not—nor even a potential arena for power, but because it is a powerful arena for mobilizing people and building the alliances we need to transform power.

There are some things we can do immediately. We can contact our senators and representatives and demand a full and thorough investigation into all the voting irregularities, especially the voting machines that gave results so mysteriously at odds with the exit polls. Whether or not the number of missed votes would have elected Kerry this time, we need to push for clean and fair elections for the times ahead.

We can support each other. As I've been traveling around the country, I see many progressive groups faltering or splintering not over deep political divisions but out of frustration with interpersonal conflicts. Maybe it's time to take a deep breath, think of one irritating ally you have trouble getting along with, and resolve to allow them just a little more leeway for being imperfect and human. We will never have the luxury of building a movement solely of likeable, congenial friends. We need to develop more skills for resolving conflicts among us, and a realization that even annoying people can still have common goals and take common action together. Now, more than ever, we need to, strengthen our solidarity, give each other comfort and succor, know that we are all in this together, and together we can make it through.

We can start thinking about how to build our base, proactively. The right wing came to power by starting small and local, taking over school boards, organizing door to door and house to house. We can create living examples of alternatives in our communities, making our positive visions real. We can turn our frustration, rage and disappointment into creative action.

Last night, we had a beautiful march, of maybe five thousand people, all the way through San Francisco from downtown out to the neighborhood where I live, exuberant, defiant, saying, "We're still here!" We came back home, shared food and conversation and frustration and sorrow with good friends and neighbors, experiencing the healing balm of community.

And I remembered, marching, that we are on the good road when we choose to be,

with each step. When we choose compassion, choose freedom, choose hope, choose to resist injustice, choose to serve life. We do have a hard road ahead, and making those choices will not be easy. It will require an effort of will, like it did to get out of bed and go downtown to march. It will require sustained, stubborn effort when times get tough. Making systemic change is like home renovation—it always takes at least twice as long and costs twice as much as you expect.

But we can still step out onto that good road, if we refuse to give up, refuse to go back, refuse to hide, refuse to flee. And instead, with courage, with hearts open and open eyes, let us take hands and go forward together.

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