

Actions and Aftermaths

July 10, 2005

It's been days since I've written or checked email—or had a shower, for that matter—but now we're back in the house at Stirling, showered, clean, and with a few moments to try and catch up. I'm finding lots of emails asking how we are after the London bombings. The news reached us in the middle of Thursday morning's meeting, while we were thinking about the impact of Wednesday's actions and trying to plan a response to the police line which arrived at 2:30 AM the night before and blocked us in. Many of us had had little sleep for two nights, and that added to the surreal horror of the news. Many people in camp came from London and almost all have friends or family there, so naturally people were afraid and worried. I saw some tears, much agitation. We took a break to meet in our barrios, our neighborhoods, to decide what to do. When we came back, we agreed that it was not a day for heavy confrontation or to try to push out through police lines—should one be inclined to that sort of thing. We cancelled our action plans, except for those involving support for the hundred or so people arrested the day before. Some people decided to try to walk out en masse in the late afternoon and go to the jail in Stirling, but they were blocked by police at the entrance to our road. Others decided to clean up the eco-village, and I had a restful day checking on all the compost toilets, improving a couple of the greywater systems and inoculating them all with beneficial bacteria that our students from the Earth Activist course had cultured.

A small group went off to try and write a statement from the camp, or at least from such barrios as might agree to sign on to it. They apparently failed, and the reasons why bear thinking about but that will have to wait until I have time to write a more reflective piece. The short answer is that while everyone in camp was anguished and horrified by the deaths in London, many also felt that they should not be set above the ongoing, everyday deaths and violence that we were there to protest against—the deaths from poverty, from lack of access to clean water and food, from the far greater state terrorism of war. And that's a tricky piece of writing to be done by a stressed group of people. Those of us on the facilitation team who might have smoothed the process were busy elsewhere, and it bogged down.

Personally, I was saddened and sick at heart. I'm here protesting the G8 because I'm against the killing of innocent victims for political goals. Hell, I'm even against the killing of guilty victims. I just want to see us evolve beyond the stage where we think that killing people is a good solution to problems of any kind. I also don't much like hypocrisy—which the G8 leaders and process exemplify. I believe the London bombers have committed wrong and immoral acts, and should be prevented from doing more of the same and brought to justice. But I don't see some great moral divide between them and the G8 leaders such as Bush and Blair, who are also willing to murder the

innocent in order to achieve their political and personal goals. I would like to see them also brought to justice for the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in Iraq alone. I would like to see them prevented from killing again. I especially dislike the hypocrisy that accords them all the power, respect and resources of the state to back their violence. That's why I come to these things, to protest, to make visible the inherent violence in the system, to demonstrate a different possibility. And yet when people are in shock and grief, when the violence of a violent system hits close to home, they don't need political analysis or larger perspectives—just expressions of shared sorrow and compassion. And I wish we had been able to somehow do this.

But let me back up and describe our day of action. Because I haven't written much fiction in a while, I'm going to write this as a story, about Graywater, fiftiesh, gray-haired veteran blockader, and her friends.

Wednesday: The Day of Action:

Tuesday night most groups headed out from camp, either early to stay elsewhere or in the middle of the night to camp for a while by the highways and be in position to blockade. Graywater's affinity group, however, organized a car caravan to meet at the civilized hour of 6 AM and support the blockades. They were due to meet at an Esso station near Stirling but the scout car who left early called back and said it was full of cops. They got up, dressed, and jumped in the car and went out there anyway. Sure enough, it was full of cops but it takes more than that to daunt their driver Kira, who had been through so many actions that it would take a tank at least to set her back.

She drove in, drove out, got gas, and somehow collected most of the caravan. After a slight delay, a caravan of about seven cars headed out to the stretch of road agreed upon for the mass blockades.

When they approached the area, they got a call from that there were groups blockading and needing support. The two head cars in the caravan drew up next to each other, taking up both lanes, and slowed down. They drove very, very slowly down the road, slowing all the traffic behind them, and sure enough far ahead they could see a small knot of blockaders on the road. They heard sirens behind them, and held a short conference on the wisdom of blocking the cops, which was interrupted by the cops pulling up beside them on the shoulder of the road, ordering them off, opening doors and reaching through windows and roughly pushing the cars off the road. They did not arrest anyone, however, just pushed the blockade off the road and ordered the cars to move on.

The caravan went on, only to be met by a new blockade up ahead. And so went the day. Every time the police cleared off a small blockade, another appeared somewhere else. The road was blocked, opened up, got blocked again. Larger groups of blockaders were corralled by police and detained, but mostly not arrested. Smaller groups were let go, to walk up and down the roadside and try to regroup. The advantage of the car caravan was mobility—although Graywater's friends had organized many blockades, they themselves actually hate to sit still, and Kira especially likes to move around and see what's happening. They were now getting word—that in Edinburgh, a hotel had been blockaded and also the M9 motorway, that the early

morning walk-out from camp had gotten out and had a battle with the cops, that other roads were blockaded along with the train tracks. What only became apparent after the blockades were over and all the stories were collected was the extent of the action: every route into or around Gleneagles was disrupted with small or large blockades. A critical mass of bicyclists rode very, very slowly from Edinburgh to Gleneagles, delaying all the journalists set to cover the meetings. Independent affinity groups did lockdowns on the smaller roads. None of the blockades lasted terribly long—maybe half an hour at most and some just for a few minutes. “If you’d blinked, you would have missed our blockade,” one activist said. But as soon as one was cleared, another popped up, and the cumulative effect was to delay and disrupt the beginning of the summit.

After an hour or two, Graywater found herself wanting a change. Hawthorne was riding shotgun and navigating, her daughter Foxglove was crammed into the back seat between Graywater and Lily of the West, the medic from Montana, both big women.

Foxglove was getting carsick and Graywater wanted to dance. The police were blocking the road and Kira attempted a U-turn to go back. They stopped her, said the road back was blocked. She argued with them, said we were going to the legal march planned to start at Auchterarder, near Gleneagles, but they kept us halted. Across the road, a busload of marchers was also stopped, and so was the entire line of traffic coming to Gleneagles from the west. A small side road ahead of us led into a village. They all jumped out of the car and Kira left in in the turnaround in the middle of the road. Other demonstrators were hovering nearby when they all noticed a Mercedes full of delegates at the head of the line of cars about to turn into the village. A French affinity group jumped out and sat in the road, blocking them. They gathered around, drumming and dancing and singing. The delegates got out of their car, looking disgusted. The police stood around and radioed for backup. For a good half an hour, they carried on and the vanload of delegates eventually gave up and turned around.

They tried hard to get the busload of marchers to come out and join us, but they wouldn’t. Finally, more police arrived, and the French linked arms, held tight, and made the police drag them away. They used some scary looking pain holds on some of them, but did not arrest them.

One of the qualities of this action is that, while the overall whole was tremendously effective, no one part felt very effective or dramatic in the moment. Some people spent the whole day being followed or corralled by cops. Only later did they realize that, by distracting the cops, they might have opened the road for others to blockade. The action was like an African drum ensemble, where each instrument is playing a simple beat, but the overlays and interactions create a complex and exciting whole. An emergent system, like a beehive or anthill or a flock of birds.

They carried carried on. There were groups of clowns, part of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, roaming the side of the road, adding a surreal touch to events. They de-escalate violence by the use of mirth and humor, and they look great, in clown makeup and army fatigues. We never quite found the time or ability to organize a Faery Army as a complement, but we did see a few Faeries appear in the actions, with wings and streamers and bright colors. At one point, the car caravan got blocked by the kids’ blockade, which the police had let through the lines only to have them block the bridge to the Gleneagles road. There were kids and clowns and a samba band all drumming and dancing on the bridge while a big bubble machine spewed rainbow

bubbles, and even the cops seemed mostly amused.

Around midday, most of the groups were heading to Gleneagles for the legal march organized by G8Alternatives, which had been called off, on and off again several times that morning. The car caravan joined them, but by the time they were rerouted around Auchterarder, parked and headed toward the march, it was twenty minutes ahead of them. They were cold, wet and tired, so they had lunch. Later they regretted it, as the tail end of the march found a weak spot in the fence around Gleneagles and tore it down, and they would like to have seen that.

Okay, enough of fiction. We got back to camp to find people in a mixed mood—restrained jubilation alternating with attacks of rampant panic. People were very afraid that the camp would be raided by cops in retaliation—for the success of the day, or for the acts of property damage committed during the early morning mass walkout, when a group ran through an industrial estate in Stirling and through the High Street in Bannockburn and smashed up a Pizza Hut and some other businesses. I was personally really saddened to get that news. Whatever the justifications might be for those tactics, doing it right next door to the safe space we had labored so long and hard to create, and antagonizing the community we had worked so hard to establish good relations with, makes as much sense as shitting in your own bed.

In any case, people were afraid of the cops coming in, although many of us thought that highly unlikely. The Scottish police force is simply not like the Italian Police in Genoa, who did raid the sleeping quarters of some of the protestors and the Indymedia Center after the '02 G8 protests and brutally beat demonstrators. But it was clear to me and many others that this situation was politically and tactically very different.

Nevertheless, rumors were rampant. They were going to raid. They were going to come in in the middle of the night. They were going to parachute in from helicopters.

We eventually agreed on a plan and an approach—that our first response would be to try and de-escalate police violence. We formed a team of de-escalators who took shifts at the gate, and I went to sleep in a friend's van near the front gate to be on call.

The call came at 2:30 AM, when the police arrived and did exactly what some of the cooler heads expected them to do—they took up a position at the point where our road met the roundabout, and blocked us in. I and about twenty other people spent most of the night de-escalating the drunks and sprinkling of outright psychotics from our own camp who seemed magnetically drawn to the police lines, trying to prevent any incidents that could flare up and spark a larger confrontation. I caught a couple of hours of sleep at the end of the night, and woke up in time for the meeting where we got the news of the London bombings.

There's a lot to ponder and reflect about in all of this, but that will have to wait for a later time. Now we're in the process of taking down the site and cleaning up, and this post is long enough. Thanks to all of you who have been holding energy and keeping us in your thoughts, and for all who have died over these last days, in acts of violence or from the lacks of poverty, by the bombs of clandestine groups or the bombs of the armies of the state, by hunger or by torture or by preventable disease, by lack of water or by lack of justice, and for all who love them, we sing:

Weaver, weaver, weave each thread
Whole and strong into your web.
Healer, healer, heal their pain,
In love may we return again.

-- *Starhawk*

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The G8, the annual agenda setting meeting of the heads of state of the eight most powerful countries in the world, occurred in Gleneagles, Scotland, July 6-8. The website for the action: www.dissent.org.uk

Indymedia Scotland page scotland.indymedia.org

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Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path, Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising, The Fifth Sacred Thing* and 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.