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Bringing the Storm to St. Paul

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2009 - Avril, April 2009 No. 14 - English - International - USA -

Date de mise en ligne : Thursday 16 April 2009

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A Grudge Match Three Years and Three Days in the Making, or How I Spent My Hurrication – a local report back from the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis/St. Paul from the perspective of the struggle in the streets. [1]

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http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L360xH239/2009_directaction_web-87048.jpg

It was on the afternoon of the twenty-ninth of August that I brought my bicycle inside my humble dwelling in the Lower Ninth Ward, then, upon leaving, padlocked the door. I knew that I might never again see my home and the few possessions contained within, and I might have pondered this fact more deeply as I trudged two miles upriver to the rendez-vous point, if there were not currents in the great ocean outside the island of my personal reality that demanded my attention.

There was a last minute scurry to acquire the needed vehicles (the ones previously allocated being used by other Gustav evacuees). Once we were loaded and ready to go, we headed to the French Quarter to pay a short visit to a comrade in the employ of local media who was staying to keep computer systems working through the storm and aftermath. After his rousing peptalk, we began the long journey northward.

It is quite unfortunate that, due to present conditions, there is little I can tell you about my comrades-in-arms without the fear that I might “incriminate” them. So, instead of the fascinating survey of our varying backgrounds, personalities and passions I would like to include, I will tell you only two things we all hold in common: LOVE for our community and HATRED for the cadre of men who, three years ago, stood by, laughing, while the people of our city died by the hundreds.

We drove through the night, the next day and well into the following night before reaching the home of our hosts in the Twin Cities. Due to similar concerns of “incrimination,” I thank our hosts and will mention them no further.

On the afternoon of the thirty-first, we entered the Convergence Center for the first time. The air felt electric as I surveyed the flurry of activity: a loud and frenzied training exercise, a food line, groups involved in heated discussion. With the evening came the spokescouncil and decisions in my group concerning our involvement in the battleplans.

It was during a lull that day that my group took a stroll to survey the terrain near the Excel Center, and we inevitably stumble upon a feature missing on all the maps we had previously studied: a substantial fence with a concrete base, steel bars and a crown of barbed wire forming a wide perimeter and renegotiating the battlefield as I had previously understood it. It was my first encounter, over the course of this adventure, with the tangible presence of state repression and the resources at its command, but thankfully, in the same glance, was my first glimpse of tangible dissenting resistance and revolutionary analysis. Upon this fence had been hung a single handwritten sign:

MR. GORBECHEV, TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

The next morning, we, who had agreed to form part of the support element for a lockdown blockade, found a secluded spot near the targeted intersection and waited until word came that delegate buses were on their way. As soon as one of our number received the affirmative text-message, we pulled up our bandannas and dashed out of our hiding place toward the blockade site, creating a few improvised roadblocks along the way. Eight people with “sleeping dragons” in a circle formation and a supporting black bloc of around three dozen who formed a protective buffer zone and built a secondary blockade by moving large metal benches into the street and locking them together took control of the major thoroughfare for over two hours and forced an official closure of the road and (reportedly) rerouting of candidate bus routes. For the first time that day (but certainly not the last), I was overwhelmed by the bravery and determination of ordinary people (and the extraordinary power thereof).

Once the lockdown was established, the black bloc linked arms and began chanting and singing. In short order, our small but vocal contingent began to dominate with our extemporaneous songs concerning our city and her dignity. At this point, I think I should mention that as we sang “You don’t wanna go to wa-a-ar with New O-o-orleans!” the hurricane was hitting the Louisiana shoreline with unknown consequences. In retrospect, I believe that if we had managed to bring enough more New Orleanians, people whose anger and fortitude has been forged in the fires of years of hardships and outrages with the motivation that, on that day, their actions might be the last remaining testament and legacy of the world they knew and loved, the events of that day would have gone very differently, and the stated goal of “shutting down the convention” may have been achieved.

After the blockade was established, most of the bloc headed downtown to join the roving groups while we stayed to witness and (if need-be) protect the lockdown through the inevitable arrests. As soon as the paddy wagon and two platoons of riot cops arrived, we were ordered to move to the sidewalk (or “face arrest”), and we complied. While one platoon moved to arrest the lockdown, the other surrounded and detained the group of us on the sidewalk including a clearly marked “green hat” NLG [\[2\]](#) legal observer. When we asked why we were being detained, one officer stated that the question could only be answered by the unit’s commanding officer; he refused to identify this ghostly “commanding officer,” then, later, after pressure from the legal observer, he admitted that, in fact, he was the commanding officer.

We were informed that our bags and persons would be searched. Those who resisted would once again “face arrest.” We made a quick huddle, threw our bags in a pile, then, backed away. We were moved to the side while our bags were searched. Afterward, we were invited to come back and retrieve the bags. As our single group representative moved forward and scooped up the pile of bags, the commanding officer, now realizing the extent of our gambit, chuckled slightly in what appeared to be grudging admiration.

Most of our bags were missing from the pile, and we were given the explanation that all the bags containing “instruments of protest” (a short litany of examples was given including: goggles, bicycle locks, cameras, bandannas...) had been confiscated to be held as evidence. By this time, the lockdowners had already been hauled away without incident; the cops decided to forgo further searches and release us.

We walked back to the vehicle, piled in and headed off in the direction of the Excel Center. After parking and debarking, we wandered the perimeter of the strange cage that the savage beasts had built for themselves for some time. Finally, as we were nearing the State Capital Building, we encountered a sizable column marching behind a large metal shield painted like the red and black banner of the CNT. In the crowd, I recognized a few faces from the CrimethInc. Convergence little over a month before (as I did on numerous occasions over those few days). I quietly moved behind one of these comrades and began to sing (in reference to a private joke between us), “Freude, schöner Götterfunken...”

He spun around exclaiming, "Holy shit! No fuckin' way!" and I replied, in my best Stephan of Ireland imitation, with the movie line:

"Our's is indeed a fashionable fight; it has drawn the finest people."

The column advanced to a perimeter gate guarded by a small contingent of riot cops. As some people started singing "Solidarity Forever" and apple cider vinegar was passed for soaking our bandannas, the terrible truth presented itself: we did not have a plan. Should we charge the police line? Should we take the street and block traffic? What is our objective? Do we even have one?

As these points were being discussed, a senior member of my group (veteran of two previous RNCs and Miami 2003) deblocked and walked over to the middle of the street beside us to vent his frustration and disbelief. "They're trying to have a meeting in the street! It's too late now!"

The gate opened and an empty delegate bus came out, stopping in front of my comrade, still ranting. Seeing the accidental blockade he'd created, he called for us to join him. As I and a few others entered the street to do so, a lone voice in the mob shouted, "He's a cop! Don't listen to him!"

This is the point, of course, where things fell to shit. Whereas discussion up until then had been civil, if ineffective, there was an angry roar of argument as the crowd dispersed away from the gate. A small group (an affinity group from the Bay Area, I was told later) was rebuking the accuser for "outing a cop" upon suspicion alone, and one of their number called out for anyone who would vouch for the accused.

"I do." I said raising my hand, "I've known him over half a decade."

The accuser apologized but maintained that my friend "carries himself like a cop." It took ten minutes or so for bad feelings to be smoothed over and the bloc to reconverge a block away - this time, with a plan.

There was word that another roving band on the opposite side of the Excel Center had been boxed in by cops, and it was reasoned that if we could make our way around to meet them, the tide would be turned. We set off and a dance of maneuvers began between us and the cops, each seeking to outflank the other as we moved counterclockwise around the perimeter. As the masses rushed through a ravine, I went on top of the ridge beside it to catch a brief glimpse of the formation of riot cops marching in our direction; for the moment, we had the advantage of speed and mobility.

Further down the path, as we neared a bridge, a young middle class couple were watching our procession with marked interest. People in the bloc cheered, "Come along! Join us!" while making arching arm motions. In response, both shook their heads politely and made timid gestures.

Then, I jumped out of the bloc and yelled, "Someday you will tell your grandchildren that you were here on this day, and you did nothing but stand by and watch!"

As strange as it may seem in retrospect, I did not expect what happened next. I had not meant my speech to be a persuasion or appeal; I was expressing my anger at the complacency of so many, and, without waiting for a response, I jumped back into the bloc. The two looked at each other, then, clasped hands and ran into the bloc after me. Upon reaching me, the man stated, "We're coming with you."

I replied, "Now, you'll have a different story to tell." and, perhaps, their decision and action at that moment changed all of their stories from that point onward. One can only hope. They asked about what we were doing and its significance, and I gave them adrenaline fueled explications concerning the Spanish Civil War, Hurricane Katrina and the frustrations of modern American life.

A dumpster with wheels was liberated from its mundane station and joined us in the march. The man, having been videorecording for the last few minutes, headed toward the front of the column, and the woman, anxious not to become separated in the crowd, politely took her leave.

With the cops in lumbering pursuit, we continued to round the Excel Center, and reached a street that I would later learn from my arrest paperwork is called Shepard Road. There was a continued reluctance to take the streets, despite my comrade, I and a few others making impassioned entreaties, and the column, confined to the narrow sidewalk, became dangerously stretch with stragglers a hundred meters or more from the front.

We had entered an area filled with many highschool and college students en route on foot to a concert on the other side of the river, and a few joined our ranks. One of these carrying a hastily scrawled sign reading, "McCAIN HATES MUSHROOMS" shared his malt liquor with me as we marched briskly along.

We passed underneath a bridge and turned a corner to find our way blocked by a small contingent of heavily armed police and National Guardsmen. I took a few steps into the street to secure a good vantage point for what would happen next. In discussions afterward with my group, it was stated that the best strategy at this point would have been to quietly begin circulating through the crowd (of about fifty) a plan to charge on a prearranged signal, while giving time for the one to two hundred stragglers to arrive.

This, however, is what did happen: Half a dozen people at the front suddenly charged with the shields. Perhaps, they assumed that the rest of the column would follow; it didn't. Without, effective communication and coordination, we were reduced to confounded spectators. The State's forces reacted immediately with a volley of less lethal weaponry.

The rapid popping sound of rubber bullets and the thunderous rumble and bright multicolored explosions of the concussion grenades seemed like a Fourth of July pyrotechnics display but from the least comfortable angle. The chargers retreated back into the crowd, and, as the smoke in the no man's land between us and the cops, began to drift upward, there was a moment of silence, then, another. In the third moment, I filled the silence with my voice. "Is that all you've got?" I screamed, "A fucking fireworks show?"

The buzz of life returned to both sides of the street, and, pressing their advantage, the riot cops and soldiers began advancing and firing into the crowd. As the retreat began, enough people had the presence of mind to shout the mantra "Walk; don't run!" every so often that our movement remained relatively safe and orderly. Although remaining calm and maintaining the integrity of the bloc is an obvious strategy, it requires a great deal of discipline, and I will admit that, when a grenade exploded next to me, I panicked and sprinted four or five steps.

As we passed back under the bridge, there was a particularly loud and sustained barrage, and the grand old cheer of '68 erupted through the crowd. The chanting grew in volume and intensity, and I joined in even though I had serious doubt that "The whole world is watching."

Someone who had merged into the line of stalled vehicles beside us shouted, "Move into the street! They won't shoot at the cars!" Finally, there was a general willingness to take the street.

Once I had reached a safe distance from the advancing police line, I briefly assisted a medic performing an eyewash, then, went to search for the rest of my group from whom I had been separated in the confusion. After some minutes of unfruitful searching, I headed back in the direction from which the march had come and found that a line of riot cops (probably the bunch that had been pursuing us earlier) had formed, blocking my escape route.

I went to a small hill nearby and climbed to the top to survey the scene. There were police lines on both sides, the fortress wall in front and the Mississippi River at our backs. I scanned the crowd, looking for the middle class couple from earlier. unable to find them, I assumed that they had managed to escape earlier in the fray, and, with that weight lifted, I snapped a few photographs, then, walked back down the hill. I had distributed disposable cameras among the group that morning with the hope that at least one would make it out. Mine was the only one that did. [3] The outcome of the situation had become certain and inevitable. The lines in motion of riot cops looked like Roman centurions, and I was reminded of the plight of Spartacus's army two millenia ago, trapped with there backs to the ocean. I circulated through the crowd, informing the uninvolved locals of the gravity of the situation and telling them to use their cellphones to contact friends or family on the outside.

Orders came over the megaphone for us to sit on the ground and place our hands on our heads. A local newspaper article the following morning stated that the police had broken up and arrested people at a "sit-in." I found a group of people I knew and got from them the phone number of a friend who was highly unlikely to get arrested over the course of the day (something I should have had when I walked out the door that morning). Then, I discarded my bandanna and pocketknife, and I found a place to sit next to the college students I had met earlier.

The jagged perimeter moved methodically inward, and, as it approached the people seated on the ground in haphazard rows, here and there, that section of the line would stop. A small breach would be made for the arrest team to enter; the arrestees would be extracted, one by one, and, once the ground was clear for a few meters ahead, the advance began again. As the bunch in front of me were being hauled away, I began to sing, with as much sarcasm in my voice as I could muster,

"God bless America! Land that I love! Stand beside her and guide her..."

People around me took the cue and began to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" with taunting boisterousness. As soon as we finished the stanza, it was our turn.

Once my hands were ziptied behind my back, I was bid to stand and was directed through a long slow backward walk with a riot cop chaperon on each arm. After, perhaps, fifty meters of walking, I reached a processing station that had been set up in the street. First, I was searched, while the one of the two cops bureaucratically designated as my "arresting officer" filled out forms and asked to verify the information on my ID card. Once this phase was completed, Mr Arresting Officer said,

"I want to thank you for not resisting."

I replied that I could not see anything that I would accomplish by doing so, and this seemed to be a satisfactory answer. Seeing no reason to believe my captor had any interest in my politics or why I had felt the need to travel over a thousand miles to end up in police custody in an unfamiliar city, I limited my speech to short, legally prudent responses and procedural questions. To his credit, Mr. Arresting Officer conducted himself in a polite and professional manner, and I was willing to suspect that he would rather have been protecting people from rapists and murderers or whatever he thought his job entail back when he decided to join the police force.

Once I was judged to be manageable, the other cop left to go arrest more people, and my arresting officer and I

joined the slowly moving line toward the bus. A very angry looking cop holding what looked like a shotgun, but upon seeing the 40mm rounds he was porting as well, I realized was a grenade launcher, moved down the line, to our left, making pronouncements concerning each arrestee. He had apparently been one of the ones firing upon us earlier and was now identifying “troublemakers” for “special treatment.” His menacing tone could not hide his bubbling mirth as he derided the captives and chuckled out the level of their charges based upon arbitrary criteria. [4]When he got to me, he suddenly fell silent and stared at my face. For a few seconds, we were both nearly motionless and expressionless.

“I don’t recognize this one at all.” he said and moved on down the line. My status was downgraded to “misdemeanor.”

At the end of the line, my paperwork and personal effects were handed to an administrative worker. Mr. Arresting Officer and I stepped in front of a portable white background screen for my mugshot. It felt like a strange, fucked up family portrait, and, with the surreal absurdity of the situation, I had to smile. In stereotypical “Minnesota Nice” fashion, my arresting officer bid his farewell.

“Have a nice day!”

“Thank you! I hope you do as well!” I replied, as I stepped on the bus, and I actually meant it. Just as the conscripts of opposing nations have no personal quarrel, the tyranny of situation caused us to meet as adversaries. Despite their role as the foot soldiers of oppression, the police are still members of the working class, with as much stake in our struggle as everyone else. I do not place it beyond the realm of possibility that Mr. Arresting Officer and I will meet again, one day, on the same side of the barricades.

I was directed to my place and seated. There was a general mood of gloom and frustration until a single person began to sing,

“Don’t you worry ‘bout a thing, ‘cause ev’ry little thing is gunna be alright. Don’t you worry...” within minutes, the entire bus was swaying, tapping feet and singing along. We jovially welcomed each new arrival, as the bus was filled.

After a while, we tired of that song and began singing another. For the next hour or so that it took to load up the bus and journey to the jail, our “prison bus choir” continued without stop. Whenever one song came to an end, someone would start another, and all who knew the words would join him. These were mostly relatively apolitical songs chosen for their simplicity and general familiarity: pop songs often heard on the radio in years past, children’s songs, songs deemed to have an ironic connection to our situation. One exception to this was Against Me!’s “Baby, I’m an anarchist!” the singing of which was led by by a young man who, judging by his appearance alone, I would have assumed was just another “spineless liberal” like the one denounced in the song.

Inside the jail compound, as the bus was idling in front of the garage door, we finished singing Johnny Cash’s “Folsom Prison Blues” and had a quick discussion in which an informal consensus was reached that, once we pulled inside, our final song would be “The Star Spangled Banner.” The door to the giant garage rolled up, and the bus went inside. To our right, was our welcoming committee. They were standing in rows next to their staged equipment. There was a very military smugness about them, and some were even standing at parade rest. Then, we began to sing.

“Oh, say, can you see...” Their expressions changed immediately. Some showed guilt at our implied accusation, frowning and hanging their heads. Others went berserk, scrambling to close the bus windows to deaden the sound. In the end, they resigned to the flagellation and held back until we had finished. We put extra volume and emphasis into the final lines, stomping our feet and shaking the bus during the fermatas. Then, the highly demoralized forces entered the bus to unload us.

My experience at the Ramsey County Jail was much like a typical visit to the Jefferson Parish DMV, except I was processed more quickly and afforded more human dignity. In the final waiting area before the release, I found out, from other inmates, that my city had apparently survived Gustav and that the female arrestees, who had been immediately segregated from us, had received much harsher treatment. I conversed at length with a local real estate agent who had been caught up in the the same mass arrest as me and suggested that he should make rearrangements in his life, so that he can have more time for reading and other simple things he enjoys. I plan to be checking up on him soon, to see how this is coming along.

Finally, half a dozen of our names were called. We signed our release papers, were lead through the door and loaded into an armored transport vehicle. After a short ride, we were released in the jail parkinglot and given the plastic bags containing the items found in our pockets and some legal papers. There was, then, an invitation shouted from the prisoner support encampment at the end of the parkinglot. There were food, water and cigarettes for those who wanted any, and volunteers from the Coldsnap Legal Collective took notes on everyone's case particulars.

With my cell phone back in my possession, I called, first, my friend on the outside, then, a Canadian journalist [5] with the news. Two comrades arrived, shortly thereafter, with my ride to the house. On the way there, I was told how the rest of the group had avoided my fate. [6] When we got to the house, I was very glad to be spending the night on a living room couch, rather than a holding cell bench.

On the morning of the second, we had breakfast at the Seward Cafe [7] and got the photographs I had taken developed nearby. As it was judged best that I avoid a second arrest at all costs, I was dropped off at the Convergence Center, while the rest went to the Poor People's March. I spent the day helping at the Seeds of Peace mobile kitchen. As I was finishing serving dinner, back at the Convergence Center, the Others arrived for me. We made a visit to the Arise! Infoshop, then, continued on to the Bedlam Theatre for a show to benefit prisoner support.

Having arrived before the bands started, most of us made our way up to the top floor balcony to enjoy the view and fresh air, while we waited. Soon after, police began arriving outside and employing intimidation tactics. I learned later that they had intended to raid the building, but agents of the NLG held them at bay.

As the flurry of apprehension swirled among us, I noticed a familiar face. It was a notable folksinger whom I recognized from the photographs on his album covers. Some of his more famous songs concern: Hurricane Katrina, Irish immigrant fighters in the Mexican-American War and, ironically enough, being cornered in a building surrounded by cops. Preferring the adrenaline rush of picking up a conversation with a celebrity of sorts to that of worrying about the police, I went over and introduced myself.

I was rather flustered, at the beginning, but he was flattered that anyone recognized him at all and made reference to Utah Phillips's joke of having "dozens of fans worldwide." The conversation drifted toward Katrina, and he was quite amused to hear that I had weathered the storm in an abandoned stripclub somewhere between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. While we were conversing, the situation downstairs diffused. Having other place to be, the folksinger took advantage of the window of safety and went on his way.

I set about to wandering through the crowd again; then, suddenly, a man with multiple facial piercings started yelling at me.

"What the hell are you doing here! You never leave New Orleans!" It was a trainhopper whom I had met the previous winter. He motioned me over to the table where he and his associates were assembled, inquired as to how my sister was doing and proceeded to tell those present of the many gallons of beer we had drank together in a bar known primarily for the cheapness of its drinks. There were other young hobos, that I had met before, there as well. It seems

that, if you live somewhere that people from everywhere come to visit, wherever you go, there will be people you know.

The concert had begun downstairs, and I went down to watch. As I mentally reviewed the events of the past few days, a very beautiful musing came to me:

If our refusal to bow to any master, even God, prevents our entry to Heaven, then, the only suitable place for us in the hereafter would be something along the lines of a Valhalla for anarchists: In the morning, we would set about to gathering food from gardens, orchards and magically abundant dumpsters. We would all work together to make a magnificent feast which we would all sit down to share amidst lively conversation. In the afternoon, we would take to the streets. There, we would face the forces of the Fascists with daring and innovative tactics, giving “all power to the imagination.” At sunset, our adversaries would scatter to the four winds as the injuries their weapons had inflicted would spontaneously become healed. The doors of the jail of the jail would swing open, and those within would rush out, into the embraces of their comrades. All assembled again, we would celebrate with song, dance and playful diversions. As the fires dwindle, we would find our places to sleep for the night while excitingly whispering to one another our anticipation for the next day.

Word circulated through the crowd that, once the concert finished people would take the public transit train to downtown Minneapolis for a spontaneous action. Our group separated into those interested and uninterested in participating (a close to even split) and made arrangements for meeting afterward. We, the nonparticipants, got drinks at the bar and went back to the top floor balcony.

Before long, one of our cellphones rang. Things had gone horribly wrong! There had been a tipoff, and the police managed an ambush. Group members had scattered to escape arrest. Luckily, amidst the tense confusion, we managed to move through the neighborhood as an inconspicuous group to our friends hiding places; so, they could deblock and blend in with us along our winding route back to the vehicle.

The next day, we took a break from protest activity to split up and explore Minneapolis on foot. While sheltering from the rain under the awning of a large tenement building, my group of three met two residents, Somali immigrants named Muhammad and Ahmed. Muhammad found the political situation in America to be, in certain ways, even more confounding than those of his wartorn homeland.

“I saw you guys on TV last night. There is something I do not understand. You protesters are white people. The police are white people. I do not understand. Why are they shooting their own people?” We explained that, in this country, there are many factors which outweigh the bonds of ethnic kinship and that it was our ideas, more than it was ourselves, that the police were trying to kill. Muhammad pondered this briefly, but it did not seem to answer the central point of the quandary to his satisfaction.

After the rain subsided, we spent some time at a nearby playground, then wandered streets lined with businesses run and frequented by the city’s Muslim immigrant population. In this rambling, we stumbled on a stalwart fixture in the Twin Cities radical community, the Mayday Bookstore, where we lingered for sometime.

After wandering further and becoming somewhat lost, we went into the Hard Times Café [\[8\]](#), to ask directions. Inside, we found not only others from our group but also, at another table, the lockdowners from two days before. I gave them prints of the more interesting photos I had taken and discussed the possibility of traveling to each other’s cities for future actions.

Once we were all reassembled, we went to the Ramsey County Courthouse to watch arraignments. We witnessed

the proceedings for (among others) a New Orleanian friend who had moved to New York after The Storm and the people now known as “The RNC 8.” [9] The naked aggression of Totalitarianism in that courtroom was the most frightening thing I saw on that trip (or, quite possibly, ever), and it fed my nightmares for weeks afterward.

We spent the fourth sorting out problems with the vehicles and making other preparations and arrangements for the long journey home. On the return trip, we could afford a more leisurely pace. We spent the night of the fifth in Chicago. The day and night of the sixth, was filled with the long journey southward.

As night fell, and we were within a few hours journey from home, sending word to friends to herald our arrival, we began to receive phone calls and text messages concerning the state of the homefront: Despite nature’s sparing of the city, Katrina style martial law was in effect. A gentle friend of ours had been beaten severely by the police for being found outdoors after curfew. Another hurricane, Ike, was in the Gulf and headed our way.

We stopped at a gas station on the northern shore of Lake Ponchartrain to wait for the sunrise (and, with it, the lifting of curfew). Stark realization gradually shifted into grim determination, and we began to make plans. It was then that we knew: our battles were only beginning...

Afterward: The Beginning of Our Battles

I had originally intended to end this story there, on the Northshore, with a literary cliché akin to “The Cliffhanger” or “The Hero Rides Off into the Sunset.” However, in real life, heroes tend not to have the luxury of riding off into the sunset but must, instead, stay and make a stand, and, if you ever find yourself hanging from a cliff, you can safely expect to have one of two possible outcomes: either you will fall to your death or you will summon the strength to climb up to the ledge. With anarchists across the United States asking a collective “What do we do now?” in the wake of the 2008 Party Convention Protests, what happened next may be the most important part of the story.

Within a few days of our return, we held an affinity group meeting. Out of this meeting, came the conception of four projects that would be implemented over the following weeks. First of these, we decided to create an educational pamphlet concerning the government’s opportunistic use of Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav to institute oppressive, militaristic policies. Second, we held an “RNC (and DNC) Reportback” event in which we showed video footage culled from various internet sites; then, we (and other locals and visiting travelers who had gone to the Convention Protests) talked about our experiences and answered audience questions. At this event, we passed out copies of our pamphlet, which had been completed by that time, entitled “End Homeland Occupation!” Third, we created an email listserve to discuss and coordinate future plans and events. Fourth, we put out the call for a citywide anarchist meeting (something which had not been done since before Katrina).

With October, came the arrival of the Bay Area based activist, Kirsten Brydum. On her second night in New Orleans, she was murdered under mysterious circumstances. An informal memorial service was held near the home of her hosts. Had she not been killed, she would certainly have met most, if not all, of us who came to her memorial and, by all accounts, would have been well liked among us. Unfortunately, like most people who were there that night, the only time I had the opportunity to spend with Kirsten was a few moments in front of a candlelit altar on which were placed various mementos including: fliers for the Really Really Free Market and other events she had helped organize, a few pieces of modest jewelry and a neatly folded, black bandanna.

While we were assembled to mourn that which might have been, someone mentioned that some other cities, such as New York, have volunteer escort programs, so that people do not have to bike alone at night (Kirsten was shot on her way home from a show). Immediately, several people expressed a belief in the need for a similar program here and, what’s more, a willingness to help make it happen. Material for writing was gathered, and contact information was

collected. At the time of writing, this program, dubbed the Brydum Tandem Project, is nearing the end of its planning stages and, with a pool of over fifty volunteers, is projected to launch in early 2009.

We scheduled the first Citywide Anarchist Meeting on the twenty-sixth of October, to coincide with the Starbucks Corporation Convention. In the early afternoon, we held a potluck in City Park which was attended by thirty to forty people, some of whom were people to whom we had no previous connection that were drawn by our flyering efforts. For the meeting portion, we held a round of introductions with a listing and explanation of each person's current projects. There was a mediated discussion, from which, the main point that arose was the need for continued and wider outreach. The meeting was drawn to a close, and thirteen of us went across town for an action on behalf of the IWW/SWU. [10]

With picket signs, leaflets, chants and a giant banner bearing the slogan "Starbucks, stop your union busting now!", we greeted the convention delegates as they arrived at the Sheraton Hotel. Then, we took the street and marched to the Ernst Morial Convention Center. Once we got there, waiting police threatened us with arrest for "trespassing", if we did not move away from the Convention Center. There was a Starbucks across the street, and we gladly moved our picket in front of it, much to the police's confoundment. Deciding that we had made our point and were, now, greatly outnumbered, we moved down the sidewalk to peaceably disperse. As we were doing so, the police arrested one of our number, traveler who had stopped in town on his way home to Vancouver.

Within an hour, we fired up an impromptu legal support operation. It took several days of work, but we managed his release and, later, the dropping of all charges against him. Our Canadian friend ended up staying in town much longer than we had anticipated and becoming very much a part of our community, but he hopes to be heading home soon to help plan and coordinate the momentous protests which will be happening in his city in February 2010.

In the early hours of the sixth of November, on my way home from my job at a bar where, that night, TV election coverage had been projected on a screen, and the patrons reveled joyously as the results were announced, a coworker wanting to be in on the adventure and I went to newspaper distribution boxes and wrapped their contents with pages of counterfeit newsprint bearing the headlines "Capitalism Wins at the Polls" and "Anarchy Brewing in the Streets." It was a small prank that received only slight, passing notice. However, it was an action of historical significance in that it was the first instance of an organizational network created to coordinate the activities of activists from various cities at the Party Convention Protest, Unconventional Action, directing simultaneous actions in, at least, twenty cities.

That November was a time that stirred the imagination with the promise of infinite possibility. On the first, Prospect One, an international art exposition patterned after the Biennale di Venezia opened at venues across the city. In addition to the official exhibits, hundreds of independent displays could be found throughout New Orleans. The New Orleans Fringe Festival, a theatre and performing arts festival affiliated with an annual festival of the same sort in Edinburgh, Scotland, also made its debut that month. The energy of these two European imports merged with the growing energy of homegrown institutions, the Seventh Annual New Orleans Bookfair and the Third Annual Press Street 24 Hour Drawathon, to usher in a short season that was no less than a veritable Mardi Gras of Art. Just as the Lords of Misrule emerge from the wintery shadows each spring to achieve their whimsical conquest of the city, the spirit of boundless creativity laid siege to New Orleans, and people moved about with the constant risk of a beautiful and thought provoking assault upon the senses lying in ambush around every corner.

Shortly before the arrival of Gustav, New Orleans was visited by the internationally renowned guerrilla artist, Banksy. The scenes he left on the walls of various buildings (such as: two National Guardsmen looting a TV and stereo, a child with a refrigerator floating on the end of a string like a kite and a man in coveralls painting grey over sunflowers) showed uncanny knowledge of and insight into our city's recent history. This artistic rampage and its aftermath marked a turning point in what the Times-Picayune fondly calls "The Graffiti Wars", a long standing conflict between

the civic vigilante, Fred Radtke [11], and his group of protégés, Operation Clean Sweep, who paint grey primer over graffiti and street art versus advocates of freelance city beautification typified by the local artist, Rex, and his organization, Nola Rising, which promotes the use of public art to catalyze the city's recovery. With public opinion swinging firmly to their side, the city's many artisan ninjas increased the quantity and quality of their work. One day in November, while I was walking through the Bywater, I stumbled upon a larger than life image of two lovers embracing with meticulous detailing reminiscent of an Oriental woodblock print, on the side of an abandoned building. Two passing bicyclists screeched to a halt at the sight, and, upon closer inspection, pointed out that the wheatpaste was still wet. With the knowledge that the artist must have been standing in our places just minutes before, and we were the first to discover his work, we stared, transfixed with the kind of awe one might have at finding the visage of the Mother of God burnt onto one's grilled cheese sandwich.

As is typical, with the City's seasonal flux, many long term projects were energized, that fall. The New Orleans Independent Media Center [12] increased their activity; their coverage of the Starbucks Convention Protest was featured on the national Indymedia website. Louisiana Books 2 Prisoners has adjusted to the moving of their workspace from the 511 Marigny building to Nowe Miasto, in Midcity, and had great success with fundraising at the Bookfair. Many local community resource projects such as our local infoshop, the Iron Rail Book Collective, have received a fresh crop of volunteers among the influx of people who had spent the summer elsewhere.

Plastic distribution boxes for real estate publications and other pathetically disgusting wastes of our continent's forests, such of those which were so famously thrown into the streets of St. Paul to make improvised barricades, have begun appearing at busstops in Midcity, repainted and filled with free radical literature. Perhaps, dear reader, you acquired this lovely piece of propaganda by reaching into one such "miniature infoshop." It is planned to make its first appearance soon after our second Citywide Anarchist Meeting on, this, the first week of December, where the manuscript will receive its final review before publication.

In conclusion, having recovered much of the energy of the Summit Protest Era, a decade ago, American anarchists must carry on our momentum by establishing needed infrastructure in our own communities. To make lasting gains, this must be done in ways that engage and involve our neighbors and address issues important to community members (e.g. violent crime, homelessness, educational shortfalls)

American anarchists have, of late fallen under the spell of idolizing the spectacles made by our European cousins without serious enough study of the methods by which they achieve their goals. We, as Americans, tend to speak with glib admiration of the "Battle of Ungdomshuset" in Copenhagen, Denmark, but, all too often, we gloss over the years of daily work by generations of Danes that made that epic struggle possible.

To the extent that large public confrontations are useful, to show our strength and determination, to cement our sense of history and common purpose, to draw new recruits with the prospect of facing their oppressors, to practice and refine tactics, we must tap from the 2008 Party Convention Protests all that we can. As the memory of Seattle 1999 fades into nostalgia and subject matter for Hollywood, and the momentous events of 1968 become as distant and abstract as those of 1917-1921, our memories of this summer are still fresh and vivid, even as the chill of winter sets in upon us. Therefore, let us proclaim to all who would listen:

"Last summer, we fought in the streets of Denver and St. Paul, and we are still fighting!"

[1] 29 August 2005 - 1 September 2008

[2] National Lawyers' Guild

[3] One reason for this was that I kept it in my pocket rather than a backpack or purse. When our bags were taken in the search and seizure, my camera remained safe and undetected. When I was arrested, it was placed in a bag with my wallet and other items found on my person. The bag was sealed during the arrest and returned to me when I was released.

[4] A certain criterion I noticed as painfully obvious was that all marked medics and people with journalistic paraphernalia were being assigned felonies.

[5] Last spring, I hosted a bunch of Canadian activists who came to New Orleans for the SPP protests. This gave me friend-of-a-friend status with a TV reporter who was interested in doing an interview concerning the protests, Gustav, post-Katrina New Orleans etc. It probably would have made for great television, but things kept popping up (my arrest, for example) that prevented us from meeting to do the piece. Oh well, your reading my story now; it had to get out somehow.

[6] Interesting tales, but they are theirs to tell (or guard the secret tricks for future use), not mine.

[7] One of several business in the Twin Cities run as a worker-owned collective.

[8] Another worker-owned collective featured in the famous RNC Welcoming Committee video "We're Getting Ready!"

[9] To learn about their cases and how you can help their cause, visit <http://www.rnc8.org> .

[10] Industrial Workers of the World (parent organization of the) Starbucks Workers Union

[11] Commonly known as the "Grey Ghost."

[12] neworleans.indymedia.org