

Challenging the WEF in New York City

by *Starhawk*

THE ACTIONS protesting the World Economic Forum over the weekend of February 1-3 in New York City were at the same time empowering and frustrating, a political victory and a tactical morass.

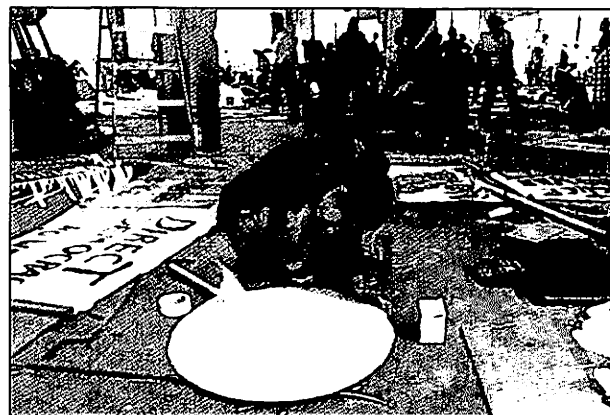
Saturday, in the march, we had something like 10,000-20,000 people out on the streets. We mobilized people in spite of a climate of public fear and official hostility that's hard to imagine unless you experienced it. New York is still in a state of shock and trauma from the attacks of September 11. While many of the activists overcame that state enough to plan and carry out an action, most of the support we can generally count on from unions and NGOs was absent.

In a climate in which the police are

widely seen as heroes and the very thought of protest is suspect, getting that many people out on the streets has to be seen as a victory. We reclaimed some political space, asserted our right to dissent, and hugely raised the social costs for the World Economic Forum. We forced the incipient police state to reveal itself, and actually changed the tone of the news coverage so in the end, New Yorkers were asking whether the Forum had any business coming to town, and whether it was the kind of thing we want to support.

The march was undeniably frustrating. The police succeeded in controlling our space from the very beginning. Not because anyone wanted them to, not because anyone deliberately

photos from New York City by
Beth Thompson



led people into a trap, not because of any lack of solidarity on the part of the march, but simply because they had the power and the resources to do so, and we didn't have the political or legal clout

or the tactical ability to stop them. And since our agreement was to keep the march safe, we were limited in the range of our responses.

Yet, in spite of all the frustrations, the march was also beautiful, inspiring and empowering. Giant puppets took the streets, visions of a better world and images of the tools to build it were carried aloft, people drummed, sang, danced and chanted through the streets. For many people, I think — especially for people who were stretching their courage to be out in

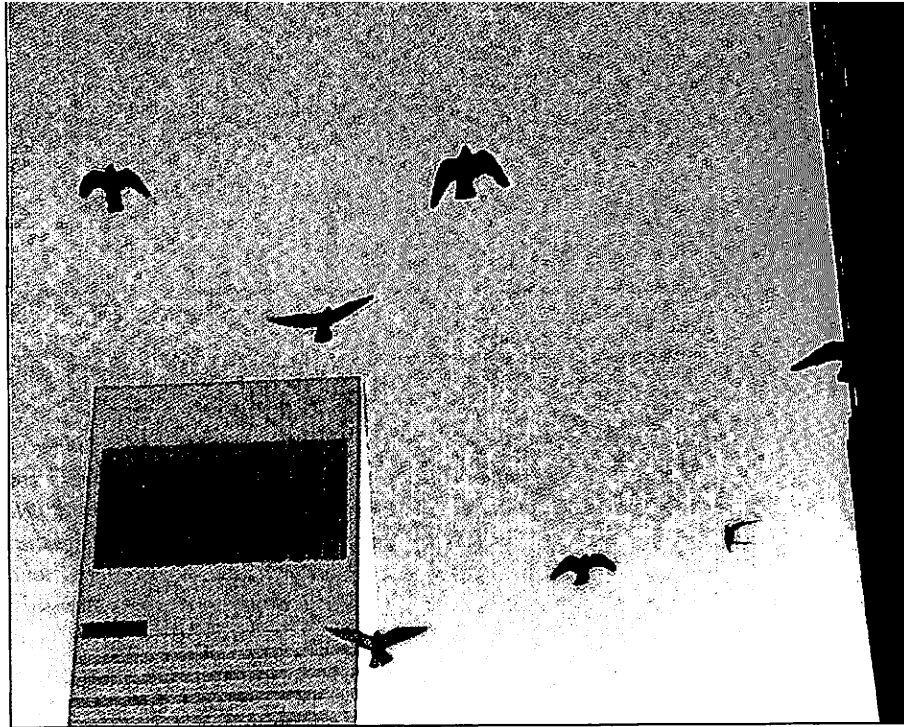


the streets at all — the march was liberating and inspiring.

TACTICAL MORASS

BUT AT THE END, the police succeeded in segmenting the march, trapping sections with barriers at intersections, and essentially preventing us from gathering for a final rally or closing. The puppets and drummers who were supposed to do a final piece of the pageant were trapped two sections back: together with the Pagan Cluster, we decided to take over the nearest intersection and hold it with a samba band, and a triumphant dance on stilts by a woman representing Argentina.

For most of the people coming to Saturday's march, I suspect the ending was less than inspiring, but not all that significant. They marched, they got as far as they could, they made their statement, and they could go home feeling good about themselves.



But for those of us who wanted some stronger action, the ending felt like a failure. We want to believe that a ragged band of anarchists can overcome the massive police power of the state, and it hurts when we don't.

But I think we need to look past that frustration and see the larger victory. When you're in the midst of it, political work often doesn't feel empowering or

successful — only when you pull back can you see its larger impact.

Our strategy can't be based on paramilitary victories over the institutions of global corporate capitalism — we might succeed on that level from time to time, but generally we are going to be faced with overwhelming force. Our real strategy is to delegitimize these organizations — and on that front, we clearly won in New York. We put the World Economic Forum on the defensive, we got people questioning its right to exist, we showed again that these institutions can only meet when they mobilize an enormous police presence to protect them at a huge cost to the public, and we did it all without giving the opposition more ammunition to use against it. We claimed and held a

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WEF Defendants Need Legal Support

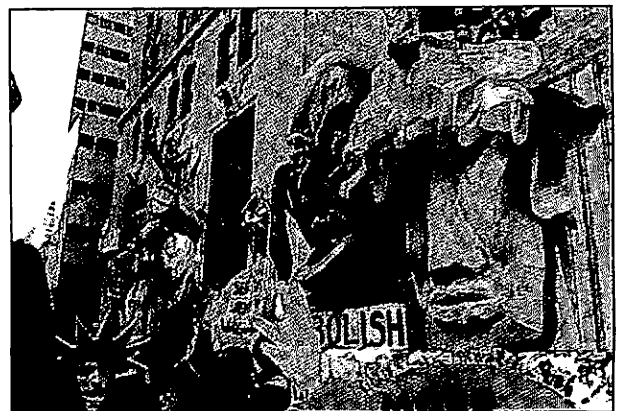
Anarchist Resistance Legal Defense Fund (ARLDF)

DURING THE World Economic Forum protests, more than 200 people from all over the world were arrested and face criminal charges. The vast majority of the charges are baseless and were trumped up by the police. These protestors were arrested for simply expressing their beliefs.

Many defendants are unable to afford to travel from their homes to New York for the numerous court appearances that they must attend to fight their charges. Without help to pay travel expenses, many of these people will be unable to attend their court hearings. The prosecutors know that many defendants cannot afford such travel expenses, and are exploiting that fact to coerce defendants into guilty pleas.

Your contribution will help ensure that no one is forced to plead guilty for financial reasons. Please help the defendants defend themselves against these illegitimate charges. Donate to the ARLDF online at www.infoshop.org/arldf.html, or mail checks payable to "ARLDF c/o Todd Hutchins" or "ARLDF c/o Clarissa Peterson" to P.O. Box 21372, Washington, DC 20009-1372.

Contact ARLDF, arldf@mutualaid.org



WEF New York

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political space that was larger than the physical space we were unable to hold.

Moreover, it was a victory for anarchists: it showed that we have the courage to go where the more liberal groups are afraid to go. It showed that we have the maturity and sophistication to adjust our tactics to the situation at hand, and that a big mobilization can be organized nonhierarchically. It stole the thunder of the parasitic sectarian groups that always attempt to position themselves as leaders of the movement, and put the anarchists out in front.

SPIRALING AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION

AFTER SATURDAY'S MARCH, many of us gravitated to Grand Central Station to eat, regroup and get warm. One of the ideas floating around the spokescouncil the night before had been some kind of action in the station. Michael, who had all along had a vision of doing something in the main concourse, gathered us all up and we decided to do a spiral dance.

So, a few of us joined hands and began singing the chant that I now know has the magic power to invoke riot cops:

"We will never, never lose our way to the well of liberty,

And the power of her living flame, it will rise, it will rise again."

We began spiraling. One of the MTA police came over and began trying to stop us. Two of our lawyers, who miraculously appeared, were trying to negotiate, I was discovering that I could drum, hold energy, and talk to cops simultaneously. Then for some reason he went away. We continued the dance. More and more cops appeared, until they formed a circle around us. The more cops appeared, the more anarchists joined the dance, and the more spectators ringed the stairways and balconies. We achieved some perfect tension between the cops' urge to arrest us all and reluctance to start something they couldn't control in full view of an audience who seemed to be enjoying the

ritual immensely. In the end, they stood back. We completed the spiral, raised what we call a cone of power — a sustained tone that focuses and directs the energy, sat down and someone began singing "Amazing Grace."

It was a small act, not as significant, maybe, as shutting down the meeting or stopping the party. But for me, it was a moment of true liberation. In the face of the enormous police intimidation of the day, we reclaimed our right to take a public space without asking permission or acknowledging their authority. We put them in a dilemma that allowed us to do what we wanted to do. We embodied what we truly stand for: joy, liberation, community, caring, and freedom.

Starhawk's regular RQ column appears on page 32.

Judi Bari

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Berkeley Copwatch, Berkeley Ecology Center, Bioneers, Circle of Life Foundation, Earth Island Institute, Environmental Protection Information Center, Grandmothers for Peace International, Greenpeace, GroundWork magazine, Institute for Social Ecology, Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, Mendocino Environmental Center, National Forest Protection Alliance, National Lawyers Guild, Nicaragua Network, Pacifica Campaign, Rainforest Action Network, Redwood Rabbis, Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, Ruckus Society, San Francisco Tenants Union, Save America's Forests, Student Environmental Action Coalition.

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For a more extensive story by Nicholas Wilson, visit www.monitor.net/monitor/9905a/jbrevisted.html

Edited by RQ. Thanks to Fly and Nicholas Wilson for updates.

Brigid in the Street

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the university.

Even among the young, hard-core demonstrators resisting the police most fervently, no one threw stones or used weapons against the police. No one wore a mask, no windows were broken.

Nevertheless, several hundred were arrested. The reason authorities gave to ban protests — that thousands of violent protesters were on their way to Munich — was obviously a lie. The purpose was to create an atmosphere of fear and criminalization, which the corporate media in Munich and the state TV news supported.

Many thanks for our web, for all your thoughtful, caring emails. We felt Brigid's blue cloak surrounding us, surrounding the Witches in New York, surrounding all our Pagan friends weaving golden threads of supportive magic in and out of Mother Earth's blue atmosphere and waters of the world. May she stay with us and particularly with the people in jail.

Hold the vision!

Erdina

RESOURCES

• These writings originally appeared on the Reclaiming activist ("RWTO") e-list. For more info, visit www.reclaiming.org/about

• Contact Reclaiming Earth Activists, hanna.lauterbach@t-online.de

• See page 47 for info on GESPINNST.

• For the week-long direct action and magical activism training with Starhawk in June, contact Moira/REA-Germany, moira.schmidt@t-online.de

Erdina (aka Hanna Lauterbach), a German Reclaiming Witch, philosopher, and activist living in Munich, is one of the co-founders of GESPINNST, a German-English women's community in the Reclaiming tradition.



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