

The Spirit of Global Justice

Book review

Lea Wood

a review of

Webs of Power, Notes from the Global Uprising by Starhawk. New Society Publishers, 2002. 288 pages \$17.95 (available from FE Books)

This book is a must read for understanding the revolution of our time. Anarchist, feminist, pagan—Starhawk speaks to everyone who has been on the barricades, actively or supportively, against the multinationals working to maximize their control over our lives. This is the story of the anti-globalization movement since Seattle 1999 when we exposed the WTO and its corporate agenda to the media spotlight.

In Part I (Actions), Starhawk describes the protests from Seattle to Washington D.C. and touches on 9/11. The second part (Visions) grapples with key questions confronting the global justice movement, including many ideas about strategies for the future. Concerned that the changes in the country since 9/11 could deflect the movement, she speaks of new strategies and tactics that this challenge calls for, acknowledging that the forces against us are formidable, more than ever, given the escalation of repression by the police.

Starhawk takes us into the streets, including five days in Seattle's jail. These are dramatic stories taken from on-the-run dispatches she e-mailed to supporters, giving them riveting immediacy. But more than narrative, we need her penetrating analysis of the actions and the forces arrayed against us. She shows the conflicts between tactics and presents them in a way that gives everyone respect.

A case in point: The actions of the black bloc, she writes, "royally pissed me off when they would not agree to the nonviolence standards of the protests' organizers in Seattle. Realizing that the black bloc had had no part in making the agreement of said standards—and believing it should have had a voice—she later came to argue for the radical edge that the bloc provides a vital part of the movement.

In the chapter "Rethinking Nonviolence," Starhawk begins with the classical nonviolence of Gandhi and King and continues to thoroughly examine its various aspects and uses, especially in relation to direct action.

"Empowering direct action," she writes, "looks for ways to embody our vision in the face of power, to get in the way of its workings...This requires great creativity...[it] aims at being more than symbolic; it looks for ways to interfere with and delegitimize the operations of injustice."

She believes the strongest tactics require modeling the kind of world we want in our actions, and further, that we do know in general what that world would look like. She describes this vision with five points.

In brief: 1) that enterprises must be rooted in communities and be responsible to communities and future generations; 2) that there is a commons to be protected, resources too vital to life to be exploited for the profit of a few, including things that sustain life, especially those that humans cannot create; 3) that as humans we have a collective responsibility for the well-being of others, and 5) that democracy means having a voice in the decisions that affect us, including economic decisions.

In the section entitled Visions, there are many examples of the above points actually at work somewhere in the world. Basic to a better world, she believes, is developing a different relationship with nature; according to

Starhawk, we need to become “indigenous”—or bonded to the land—not mired in a separateness that allows for despoiling the environment because humans believe it exists primarily to serve them.

She quotes an Okanagan elder who says “our most essential responsibility is to learn to bond our whole individual selves and our communal selves to the land”. To this, Starhawk says that the “whole system we call ‘globalization’ is predicated on the destruction of this bond.”

This book covers so many facets pertinent to the revolution for “another world.” One is an exhaustive analysis of direct action defined “as anything that directly confronts oppressive power,” followed by examples of specific manifestations. “Direct action is a tool that needs to be used together with other tools” that include building coalitions, using legislative or court systems, and more.

Analogies between human actions and nature abound, one relating to the role of diversity for a strong movement. “In nature, diversity means resilience.” A prairie with hundreds of different plants growing together can weather pests or storms that would devastate a field of identical hybrid corn. Similarly, social movements need diversity to thrive.

The global justice movement, although white in North America, is one that is “inspired and rooted among people of color around the world, from the Zapatistas of Mexico to the insurrectionists of Bolivia who retook their water supply from privatization,” and whom, in the fight against global corporate capitalism, have “faced torture, prison, and death, and have also joyfully pioneered new tactics and new forms of struggle.”

Rich with new thinking, *Webs of Power* renews this activist’s hope that “another world is possible.”

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