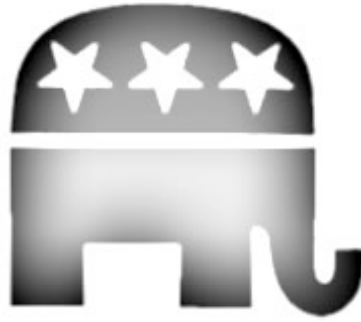


Bush and his detractors head for Manhattan



There is a renaissance in American protest and George W. Bush is its muse. In the lead-up to the November election, with his approval rating sinking faster than a rock in a Texas pond, popular opposition to Bush's war in Iraq and his policies is headed for heights not seen since the days of anti-Vietnam War protests.

Soon, we'll see how real that opposition is. Bush, the Republicans, and their many detractors are set to clash late August, when more than half a million march in New York.

The Republican National Convention (RNC) will be huddled inside Madison Square Garden, from August 30 to September 2. Opposition will be everywhere else. And aside from the central United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) march on August 29, these disjointed elements will find common ground on the streets of America's biggest city.

Much like the vibrant days of Abbie Hoffman's stock exchange money drop in 1967, protest in America is finding its creative stride again. With tongues firmly in their cheeks, The Billionaires for Bush will be in New York, "popping champagne corks in the faces of the great unwashed middle-class masses that have assembled to protest our great president," says Andrew Boyd – aka 'Phil T. Rich' – an activist with the theatrical protest group.

Activist-artist Wendy Tremayne is holding an anti-RNC lead-up event on August 17 called the 'Vomitorium.' Actors will recreate a Roman feast, but the puking Romans will be replaced with Americans – who Tremayne says are mirroring the ways of Rome. "Their gluttony was our consumerism. There was a disparity of wealth, a growth in materialism and a real reduction in intellectual pursuit." Sound familiar?

The Time's Up! bike collective will hold several critical masses and bike bloc's before and during the RNC protests. The group is also acting as an organizer for bike-related actions. The Greene Dragon's, led by Jonny America, will celebrate the American 'Revel-ution 2004' by riding bicycles decorated as horses down Lexington Avenue, screaming in the style of Paul Revere, "the Republicans are coming!" Ring Out will distribute bells to people on the streets. If enough people ring them they will "Ring out the Republicans." And famous designer Milton Glaser has called for New Yorkers to light up the sky with flashlights, candles, and plastic wands, to use light as a peaceful message of resistance to Bush, from dusk until dawn on August 30. www.lightupthesky.org

Activists and non-activists alike are furious at the Republicans' choice of New York. "For them to come here is a slap, it's spitting on us," says Jason Flores-Williams, a columnist with High Times magazine in New York, which has published an activists' guide to the RNC in its September/October issue.

Consider these facts: four out of five New Yorkers are Democrats; a Republican convention has never been held there, and a massive concrete barrier is being constructed to protect Bush and his cronies. Add to this the popular sentiment that Bush is coming to New York to wrap himself in 9/11's patriotic backdrop before the election, and the cold welcome isn't surprising. "There's a real groundswell of popular resistance against this convention," says Boyd. "Everyone is seeing this as an affront and are going to turn out in force to protest."

Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg's office is rather conveniently making life as hard as possible for a protest: the main UFPJ march has been waiting in vain for more than a year for its protest permit. Without it, the march cannot gather

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at Central Park's Great Lawn, the only site big enough to house all the protestors.

"No question, it is a battle to have a protest," says UFPJ spokesman William K. Dobbs. "If the ability to get within sight and sound of the president is threatened, it erodes protest rights for everybody. But nobody should be discouraged. This is a resistance movement within the world's only superpower."

Billionaire Boyd says he hopes protests in the city will be "fierce but peaceful," but Flores-Williams feels that New York and America is ready for a shakeup. "What I'm hoping for are something along the lines of Paris in '68 or Chicago in '68 - where this city is effectively shut down," he says.

While he supports the traditional UFPJ approach to protest, he feels the march will act as a watershed for a more widespread "organic chaos" in Manhattan. Tensions will be high, especially if the UFPJ protest isn't made legal. And he feels the time is right. "This will be a moment where the [Republicans] have to say 'wait a second. There was a million people on the streets of New York. They shut down the world's most important city. What does that mean?'"

- Timothy Querengesser

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