

# **A Brunswick Story: Democracy and Resistance Shine Through at the G8 Summit**

By Lisa Fithian

During the first week of June in Brunswick, Georgia the perpetual question in my mind was "What am I doing here?" As I sat in an Interfaith Service on Monday night June 6, a re-assuring thought came to me. Here we were in a small town in semi-rural Georgia, population 15,000, occupied by over 55 federal, state and local agencies including the Army. The fact that any opposition to the G8 Summit was happening was amazing. This brought some relief from the question of the previous week.

By the end of the Summit, I was so glad I was there. Despite media reports that the protests fizzled, I knew otherwise. I knew that the work we did was good. I knew that the coalition of local, regional and national groups forged important relationships. I knew that we all learned something new and that once again the police state, operating at a whole new level had been exposed.

Stories fed to the local community to instill fear, proved false. It was abundantly clear that the G8 summit was a training ground for the new department of Homeland Security to practice domestic occupation. From hundreds of undercover agents wearing squeaky new leather sandals to humvees patrolling the streets, one could not miss the overwhelming force deployed to suppress the community of Brunswick and the first amendment rights of ordinary people. Despite a state of emergency, the military occupation and an ever-present intimidating police force costing US taxpayers \$35 million, several hundred of us were able to carry out our planned events plus some!

So what did happen in this small, largely poor, minority community of Brunswick, Georgia? A diverse group of protestors: African America, White and Latino, young and old, Christian and Pagan from the town itself and from the far reaches of Vermont, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Texas, Canada and Africa came together to speak out against the policies of the G8 and the Bush Administration: from the war at home to the war in Iraq, from AIDS in Africa to third world debt, from the environmental destruction in our communities to the fences and occupation of other land be it Brunswick or Palestine.

In the days leading up to the Summit we engaged in extensive community outreach, leafleting business-to-business, door-to-door and worksite-to-worksite. We introduced ourselves, our concerns and put a human face on the media lies designed to portray protestors as terrorists.

The week began with the Gullah Geechee Cultural Day in Neptune Park on St. Simon Island. We feasted on the "little country boil" full of shrimp, corn, sausage and potatoes. Music and stories of the Gullah Geechee, the descendants of slaves who have been driven off their land, filled the ocean breezes as dolphins played off shore.

Others leafleted the Coca Cola plant to protest their murderous practices in Columbia. Later an Interfaith Service for World Peace and Global Justice brought together representatives from Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Pagan traditions to offer passages from sacred texts and song as we strengthened our resolve to take the streets in the coming days.

The Fair World Fair and The Other Economic Summit (TOES) focused on community building

and education for three days starting June 7, despite the fact that a permit for the space was granted just days before. Informational tables, music and food under a big tent provided a backdrop for forums on globalization, environmental and economic sustainability, debt, AIDS, first amendment rights, oil addiction, clean energy, nonviolence, corporations, law, democracy and more!

As the G8 Summit began on Tuesday morning, we gathered in the streets to protest the war in Iraq initiated by United for Peace and Justice. At the Brunswick war memorial outside the Old Court House we installed a memorial to the victims of U.S. aggression and honored the victims of U.S. Empire who lost their lives to racism, war, genocide, poverty and environmental destruction.

After a powerful commemoration by Reverend Timothy MacDonald, we marched 250 strong carrying beautiful signs, banners, and drums through neighborhoods. We stopped at the African American war memorial to honor those who had lost their life serving in the U.S. military. Harry Lyde a local resident and Vietnam vet told us of its history. We laid flowers and continued on our three-mile march to the Fair World Fair. George Friday, representing Independent Progressive Political Network, Racism Watch and United for Peace and Justice, gave voice to the concerns of communities of color. She shared the story of losing her brother, a veteran to the Vietnam War legacy of drug addiction and suicide.

Lori and Trevi Ramirez, mother and daughter of a military family, read the letter from Kathy Bush whose son is fighting in Iraq. Hip Hop Against Racist War reminded us that the land on which we stood was stolen land, that women continue to be raped by these polices and that it is the youth who are leading the way to a better future.

At the candlelight vigil we were called to remember those who have died from G8 policies. Pagan Cluster offered a spiral dance following the vigil. As the dance built in power, an undercover cop broke loose and ran from the dance!

Day 2 of the Summit exposed the toxic contamination of Brunswick as an example of the environmental injustice of G8 policies. Brunswick is the home to 22 toxic waste sites only five of which have been cleaned. From 1999-2000 alone, roughly 70 million pounds of toxins were released into the air. During the G8 Summit, however, all the plants were closed so that the G8 would not have to smell the consequences of their policies.

We gathered at the Goodyear Elementary School, built with no windows, to protect the children (average IQ of 87) from the toxic emissions from the nearby Hercules Plant. This plant has on average one spill of hazardous materials a month over the past ten years. We demonstrated how the EPA might remediate toxaphene in the soils of surrounding neighborhoods. We then marched to the front of the plant and staged a die-in while reading information about the environmental destruction of the Brunswick community.

As we rose to life, the youth bloc set off to march up the causeway. They were quickly blocked by riot police. The youth gave flowers to the Police Captain and sang the star-spangled banner to an accompanying trumpet. They were able to get the police to step back and then march around the whole intersection!

That evening protestors implemented a pilot remediation project in the backyard of a resident whose property adjoins the Hercules Plant. Soil samples were taken to be tested for toxaphene concentrations, blood meal, bone meal and rain water were mixed in a sample soil plot. Protestors will return for additional soil samples after this process has cooked! If the remediation works, we will call on the EPA to clean up the neighborhoods using this inexpensive process! The Hercules Security, who had been monitoring this

activity, called the police. They responded with 10 police cars, helicopters and a van of police but they had to stand down as we were on private property and left frustrated.

At the People's Summit local residents engaged on key issues facing the community like jobs, environmental degradation and voter registration. Even this community gathering did not escape police harassment. The police ran all the license plates and ticketed cars with payments due.

"Fix Shit Up" was a new call heard round the region! Even though they had a building permit they were threatened with arrest by the police and were subject to ongoing surveillance. This amazing group of young anarchists worked long and hard to clean an abandoned house on Martin Luther King Blvd. They removed truckloads of trash and vegetation from an overgrown lot. This home is now ready for re-building and will become part of a local church supported space for teenage moms. Several other houses also got some needed attention including some new sheet rock. It was an awesome display of constructive action and solidarity with the local community.

During the final day of the summit, protestors focused on oppression and racism with two permitted and one un-permitted march. As part of a national call to end U.S. funding of the Israeli Occupation, United for Peace and Justice initiated a demonstration to support Palestine and oppose the construction of the illegal apartheid wall. In Overlook Park, surrounded by 2x3 ft photographs of the destruction of Palestine, we formed a circle to hear stories from the occupied territories by people who had been there.

We carried a replica of the Israeli Apartheid Wall to the entrance of the causeway and finished the action by tearing down and burning the wall to symbolize the transformation from occupied lands such as Brunswick and Palestine to lands rooted in peace and freedom. These linkages were strengthened as we joined with community allies in a silent "Walk Against Racism" through Brunswick neighborhoods to the Fair World Fair.

As the end of the Summit was drawing near, the Youth Bloc, determined to bring their message to Sea Island was approaching the final checkpoint. They walked seven miles in the sweltering heat, with no stops (thanks to the police) and no shade. Police told them that if they crossed the line they would be arrested. Instead of pushing forward they sat down with flowers in hand and demanded to see the President. Hundreds of police and army dressed in riot gear with a wide array of weapons quickly filled the streets while three apache helicopters hovered overhead. Supporters were cut off and forcibly pushed back, while 14 strong and courageous young people were arrested. Many of these young people spent up to 17 days in jail choosing to go nameless in solidarity with all the nameless and faceless victims of G8 policies and to expose the horrific practices of the local jail where people can spend months awaiting trials on misdemeanors.

It was a week full of community, action and magic. Who would have thought that in a small, poor town of 15,000 in semi-rural Georgia, where the U.S. government expended an extraordinary \$35 million for security and domestic occupation that any protest could have happened at all. Though few in numbers, we were there on behalf of the six billion people who are not represented by those eight men. Our messages were loud and clear to all who would listen. We were there because we care, because we know things must change and that we are the ones we've been waiting for—with our hearts open, our courage strong and our vision clear that yes--another world is possible, another world is now!

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