

Notes on Legal Observing

By Andre Segura

The number of people present at the final orientation for legal observers was astonishing and represented the energy and strength that would be shown in the days to follow. People of all ages gathered at NYU Law to hear the final logistics of how the Mass Defense Committee would operate during the convention. Progressive legal workers, law students, and lawyers from all backgrounds united to protect the civil liberties of our fellow activists. As the demonstrators yelled “NO” to the Bush Agenda, legal observers were present in solidarity to also say no to the administration’s and state’s attempt to curtail our rights to dissent.

My team of legal observers represented the resilience of the larger group. Team “Hyena” – all teams had pre-chosen animal names – included law students from Portland, New York City, and New Haven, an IP lawyer from Oregon, and a lawyer from the Center for Constitutional Rights. Although we differed in age and experience, we were able to work efficiently as a mobile unit that could be easily

dispatched to locations around the city. Although I did not witness an arrest, I did observe video surveillance, the presence of plain clothes officers, and the use of intimidation tactics, such as officers with large dogs barking loudly in close proximity to peaceful demonstrators. These police tactics were only a small representation of what would be used throughout the week to suppress voices that called for change.

My team agreed to stay as group and meet early the next morning in anticipation of the largest march to be held during the RNC. I have never experienced anything like the United for Peace and Justice March. In a sea of demonstrators, I could see green hats throughout the procession. Standing at the corner of 8th Avenue and 34th Street in front of an army of officers on horseback, the march seemed to have no end. During the day, we again witnessed the use of tactics meant to aggravate the demonstrators, such as breaking up the march to allow for police on motorcycles to pass through time and again.

The Muster Space, headed by Bruce Bentley, Suzanne Solomon, and Ian Head, was our headquarters. The people

there were always on top of the situation and readily available to give updates over the phone. The Muster space enjoyed constant activity with LOs coming in throughout the day to sign up or to rest before being sent out again.

Although there were nearly 2,000 arrests, I feel safe to say that our presence served as one of the most significant deterrents against police misconduct and further arrests. In the aftermath of a disappointing “election,” I see a change happening around the nation. The spirit of Mass Defense and legal observing has expanded to groups such as the Election Protection Coalition, which sent non-partisan poll monitors to protect voter rights and report problems with voting during this past election. As informed citizens and members of the legal community, we have a responsibility to ensure that the movement to protect and advance our constitutional rights persists in the face of adversity in the next four years and beyond.

Power to the people!

Andre Segura is a 2L at NYU Law and was a legal observer at the RNC.

The National Office still has the famous Green Hats for legal observers available

Hats are union made (UNITE!), union imprinted (UFCW) and state in big bold black letters: National Lawyers Guild LEGAL OBSERVER on the front. Hats are \$7 each (the same cost we paid plus postage). They are available from the National Office to be given out to trained legal observers only.

Send a check or money order, number of hats requested and shipping address to:

National Lawyers Guild, 143 Madison Avenue, Fourth Floor, NY, NY 10016
Or order by mail by contacting: nlgmember@nlg.org

We will invoice you.

