

Lynne Stewart's speech to National Lawyers Guild Convention and  
Cry Justice, a convention of Activists and Organizers  
Minneapolis, Minnesota October 26, 2003

In an earlier part of my life I worked as a children's librarian in Harlem. I was a story teller. I still am happiest gathering the children, now grandchildren, together, right before bed, to read and tell stories. So powerful are these ancient tales from all the cultures of the world that one by one the adults will drift in too, or open the porch door, or turn down the radio to hear better.

And in thinking about what to say to you this morning as the closing words of this marvelous event, I am reminded of the ancient nature of what we came for, what we accomplished and where we are going. For we are a gathering of the warriors of our day; those people who were placed on this earth at this time to change it. We were summoned here because tradition; ancient and modern, affirm the strength doubled and tripled unto infinity by the collective will.

And we saw that it truly works. We warriors came here to listen to each other, to enjoy each other, to exchange ideas, to remember battles of old, to plan. We also came here and we sang and we laughed a lot and we played poker and we watched the games of autumn (next year METS!) and we hugged and hugged some more. We supped and dined and drank and toasted our heroes and derided, chided, hissed and booed our enemies. We learned. We have been inspired once again by the almost mystical and marvelous ability to gather strength through camaraderie, intellectual jousting and exchange but mostly by sharing the collective will to change the world.

Today some of us depart from the twin cities. Other warriors remain but all on Monday will be transformed back to lawyers, activists, legal workers, students and organizers. We leave here with quests to now be fulfilled on far flung battlefields. (I use these terms in the ancient and metaphoric sense and I hope not offensive to peace activists.)

For we have formidable enemies not unlike those in the tales of ancient days. There is a consummate evil that unleashes its dogs of war on the helpless; an enemy motivated only by insatiable greed - The Miller's daughter made to spin gold - the fisherman's wife: Midas, all with no thought of consequences. In this enemy there is no love of the land or the creatures that live there, no compassion for the people. This enemy will destroy the air we breathe and the water we drink as long as the dollars keep filling up their money boxes.

We now resume our everyday lives but we have been charged once again, with, and for, our quests, and like Hippolyta and her Amazons; like David going forth to meet Goliath, like Beowulf the dragon slayer, like Queen Zenobia, who made war on the Romans, like Sir Galahad seeking the holy grail. And modern heroes, dare I mention? Ho and Mao and Lenin, Fidel and Nelson Mandela and John Brown, Che Guevara who reminds us "At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love." Our quests like theirs are to shake the very foundations of the continents.

We go out to stop police brutality -

To rescue the imprisoned -

To change the rules for those who have never ever been able to get to the starting line much less run the race, because of color, physical condition, gender, mental impairment.

We go forth to preserve the air and land and water and sky and all the beasts that crawl and fly.

We go forth to safeguard the right to speak and write, to join; to learn, to rest safe at home, to be secure, fed, healthy, sheltered, loved and loving, to be at peace with ones identity.

Until we meet again our quests are formidable. We have in Washington a poisonous government that spreads its venom to the body politic in all corners of the globe. We have war - big war in Iraq, big war in Afghanistan, smaller wars in

Columbia, Central Africa, Southeast Asia. We have detainees and political prisoners at home and now looming in 2004 we have those Democratic and Republican conventions and then an election, with the corporate media ready to hype the results and drown out the righteous protests.

But there are in all of the towns and cities we return to; the people - our people, the day in day out grassroots organizers. And they are busy, coalition building, carrying out protests and actions against powers so vast and evil that our collective will must be to defend the people in this vanguard; to enable them to recruit and prepare fresh troops.

And there are also individual quests. I hope and believe that I will be in Birmingham next year; that our movement, our righteous movement will defend me and that our victory for the people, of the people and by the people will restore the defenders, and this one in particular, to the front lines of the battle.

So the long year 2004 stretches out until we meet again. We have no crystal ball but we have history. And that history teaches us. As we go forth we learn from all those who have struggled before us. A fellow traveler of an earlier time, a Communist and a Jew, Bertolt Brecht wrote as his last poem what has become my credo and I give it to you:

***AND I ALWAYS THOUGHT***

***And I always thought: the very simplest words***

***Must be enough. When I say what things are like***

***Everyone's heart must be torn to shreds.***

***That you'll go down if you don't stand up for yourself***

***Surely you see that.***

**Go forth and do justice.**