

New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>**Protest activists lay down gauntlet**

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DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

Thursday, August 5th, 2004

Some activists aren't looking for an okay from cops to protest at the upcoming Republican National Convention.

"We're going to be taking back what belongs to us," said Eric Laursen, one of the organizers involved with A31, a coalition of activists who've spent months planning protests without permits.

Police may call them illegal, but the protests are acts of civil disobedience, organizers say.

The constitution "doesn't say you have freedom of assembly if the police want you [there]," said activist David Graeber. "In Nazi Germany, you had freedom of assembly if the police wanted you to."

Among the plans are hundreds of white-clad protesters marching from Ground Zero before "dying" on the streets in front of Madison Square Garden on Aug. 31, Day Two of the GOP gala, and sit-ins outside high-end companies. The activists range from a community gardener to the mayor of Nyack, who defied state law when he married gay couples this year.

All insisted the coalition doesn't condone violence and that their actions will be peaceful. But they also said they can't control what individuals do, and angrily blamed the cops for violence at rallies in the past.

NYPD spokesman Jason Post said the police are "principally concerned about protecting New York City against terrorist or violent acts. At the same time, we expect everyone to obey the law, including protesters. We're prepared to take appropriate action for any situation."

Meanwhile, three city congressmen prodded Mayor Bloomberg to sign a pact spelling out procedures for regulating and policing of demonstrations at the convention.

But Bloomberg rebuffed the effort, praising the NYPD and saying he's always stood up for First Amendment rights. "This city is going to protect everybody in this city: those that want to protest, those that want to praise and those that want to be silent," he said.

Told the mayor had already said no, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-Manhattan) countered at a press conference where he was joined by Reps. Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) and Major Owens (D-Brooklyn) on the City Hall steps, "We don't need his signature; we want the spirit of what we're doing, rather than a legal contract."