

August 5, 2004

Group Plans Illegal Protests on 2nd Day of Convention

By DIANE CARDWELL

Members of a group opposed to the Republican National Convention, many describing themselves as anarchists, said yesterday that they would carry out illegal protest activities on the convention's second day.

Organizers in the group, the A31 Action Coalition, said they were calling for a nationwide day of nonviolent civil disobedience on Aug. 31 aimed at using parts of Midtown to stage demonstrations, without permits, against the Bush administration. The organizers said they were looking to break free of government intervention to have their say; they called the process for issuing permits broken and criticized the city's practice of using metal barriers to create rally areas or march routes.

"It is here, at the end of the barricades, that we will create free-speech zones, where we can create the kind of world we want to see through music and free food and dancing and debate," said Tim Doody, an organizer, at a news conference at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, in the East Village. He added that that if asked to move, participants planned to sit down and refuse. "Freedom of assembly isn't so free if you have to ask the government where, when or if."

Throughout the day, organizers said, participants plan to demonstrate outside a variety of institutions, including a Bank of America finance round table planned the morning of Aug. 31 at Tavern on the Green and several corporations they see as contributing to the Bush administration's foreign policies or profiting from them. That evening, the protesters plan to converge around the convention site, Madison Square Garden, outside the official security zone. The coalition, still being formed, represents a broad array of interests, including education, welfare and opposition to the war.

The notion of anarchists organizing a news conference announced well in advance and held before a gaggle of reporters might seem a little odd, given the popular image of anarchists as shadowy, brick-throwing rabble-rousers bent on wreaking havoc and spreading mayhem. But the group, although anti-authoritarian, said that it is opposed to any actions that hurt people and that the tradition of civil disobedience calls for open communication of its plans rather than disguise.

Although organizers did not disavow property damage, they said they were not calling for it. They said they expect many of the planned actions to stay within legal limits. For example, demonstrating on sidewalks without blocking pedestrians or access to buildings and without using amplified sound is legal and does not require a permit.

Police officials warned the demonstrators against any lawbreaking activities. "We're principally concerned about protecting the city against terrorists or violent acts," said Paul J. Browne, the Police Department's chief spokesman. "At the same time we expect everyone to obey the law - even protesters."