

## ARTICLES.

## ■ GREENHAM COMMON PEACE CAMP

Down Among  
The 'Wimmin'

SALLY BELFRAGE

Since September 1981 a loud, rude, entirely female noise has been heard from Greenham Common, England. Outside an American Air Force base, which is guarded by British troops and police, varying numbers of women have been a constant presence, protesting the installation of U.S. cruise missiles. On April 4 the law mounted the big eviction, and all the media came to report the demise of the women's peace camp. Television cameras shot the funeral. "PEACE CAMP CLEARED OUT," said the *Evening Standard's* front page: "Tents ablaze as the bailiffs move in." To the outside world it looked over. But this first and best-known of the world's peace camps is far from moribund and a trip to Greenham Common showed it to be larger than ever.

An hour and a half west of London along the Newbury-Basingstoke road, past the Main Gate, there is a huge fence surrounding the place where the women used to camp, with stumps of trees, building machinery, patrols of soldiers and the ugliness of the base spilling out. The newly wired-in area is part of the road-widening scheme used to justify the eviction; in fact, the road has been narrowed and two cars can barely pass. By curtaining off the peace camp in this way—except on the north side, where few drive and where the encampments at Blue and Red Gates are perched without room for expansion—the authorities have tried to make it not exist.

The women, suspicious of the press (tabloids have often sent infiltrators to "expose" lesbianism or near-starvation), seemed more concerned about their own morale and their feminist structures than about being seen and heard outside. But even at the Main Gate, behind the fenced-in upheaval, some women (or wimmin, as they spell it), including the indomitable Jane Dennet, grandmother of sixteen, and Sarah Hipperson, ex-magistrate, were camping where they always had, albeit without tents or other shelter. Hipperson was busy planting cucumbers and tomatoes in an old pram, so the bailiffs couldn't get them in a raid.

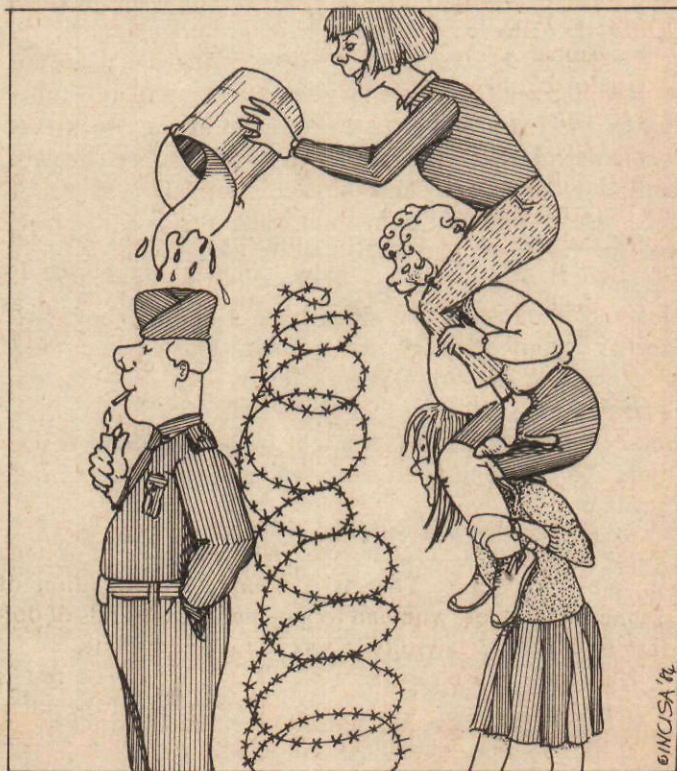
A drive around the base revealed dozens of women at all six gates attempting to keep warm by their campfires while soldiers inside the fence did the same by theirs. A visitor could join in the usual camp activity: talking, keeping watch, waiting. The wait might be for the bailiffs or for a cruise to poke its long silver nose through the wire, but usually it was just for the next meal.

Initially the camp's objective was to prevent the installa-

tion of ninety-six cruise missiles. The first of them were flown in last November; since then the idea has been to prevent them from getting out. Indeed, only one cruise launcher has left the base so far—in the middle of the night on March 8. Police surrounded the sleeping women while a convoy tested its mobility by driving around the British countryside. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament monitors kept track of its progress until it returned three and a half hours later.

On one side of the camp at Green Gate was the fire, a clever arrangement of grill over dugout, covered with blackened kettles and enormous cooking pots. Tea and coffee were in constant preparation, and boxes and bins nearby stored the rest of the kitchen—odd mugs and cutlery and plates, vegetables and granola and biscuits (all encampments are vegetarian). Someone was nonchalantly mixing batter in a saucepan, wiping the smoke from her eyes; another cooked tortillas in a vast skillet; another somehow cleaned dishes in icy water; a fourth chopped rhubarb and grapefruit for the evening sweet. Around the fire, logs or boards on rocks and one old wicker chair supported a full circle of women—of every age but mostly young, big-boned and strong. Hair was short ("Fearful dearth of shampooing facilities," as one put it), lots cut boyishly with tails down the back, some colored outlandish shades of pink and green. Everyone seemed healthy and grubby, and when you sat for a quarter-hour your hands became coated with grime, fingernails black, just from picking up a kettle or adding wood to the flames.

Nobody was "in charge." The one who took over at any given moment was the one doing the work—getting the



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meal, pouring the coffee, organizing the night watch which would wake the others should a cruise launcher and convoy take to the road. Volunteers were easy to come by, even for the 4 A.M. shift. There was a warmth and camaraderie among them, the kind you'd expect from front-line troops in a constant state of risk. It was often hard to realize that is what they are. Given their "invisibility," it was even harder to understand the degree of support they continue to receive from behind the scenes: abundant contributions of food, wood, clothing and generous checks, arriving daily from people throughout Britain and abroad.

At Green Gate, U.S. Army personnel flashed their passes to go in and out, and police cars crept along, checking out the license plates of the campers' parked cars. Beyond the road was a lovely encampment under the trees of an old wood. Sunlight shone spots on tents dotted around and on a couple of "benders"—plastic sheeting draped on branches, a Greenham invention to bypass a law forbidding dwellings on the Common. A washstand with a mirror was attached to a tree, and two dozen toothbrushes stood in a mug beside the basin. Plastic jugs of water rested on ground soft from decades of embedded woodland debris. The base's generators roared in the distance, and you could hear the barking from the kennels where the Alsatians are kept; at night, spotlights penetrated the trees at intervals, and the women were always watched. Otherwise, you might think it a holiday camping ground of great charm.

Off to one side was the "sanctuary," a small hollow owned by a friendly local where the women store their things away from the threat of eviction. Nearby was the "shit pit," boards over a hole in the ground, a heap of freshly dug earth for cover and, in it, a child's spade. No smell at all. Everything extremely neat and well organized, with a respect for nature given scant attention on the other side of the fence.

Divided by barbed wire, a world created by powerless women and another made by powerful men: anyone walking by the fence might have a thought about which they would like to live in. Over there, new rolls of razor wire were constantly being unwound; bunkers, barracks and missile silos were being built in the mud where the trees had been torn up. Over here, patches of flowers had been planted. In a clearing near a fire, a cardboard box with a bit of blanket inside and a matching tent slung from a branch above was labeled "Igon's Bender"; a huge black-and-white cat was usually to be seen within, peering out at what was going on. Over there, a soldier sat in a tower under corrugated iron, doing something similar, a bright orange spotlight beside him and a crackling radio set to send and receive reports of female mischief.

Mischief has been pretty constant, but the Army and the police, by not officially recognizing it, have undercut its impact, and the women haven't bothered to tell anybody but one another. The night I was there four women cut a hole in a stretch of fence and made their way nearly to the main control tower before a patrolling jeep caught them in its headlights. "I've got some. What should I do?" the jeep's driver radioed in. While someone somewhere thought

what to do, the women scattered and caused a bit of bother. Eventually they were all rounded up; taken in, they were asked to strip "down to the bottom layer" and searched. This was related at fireside by a triumphant woman of about 60, wearing a poncho decorated in appliquéd peace signs: "One policewoman had rubber gloves on—that gave me rather a start until it turned out she was just wearing them to handle our clothes. If you'd seen our socks you'd know she was *quite right*." Their names were taken; then they were told that they wouldn't be charged this time, but mind not to do it again. They said of course they would do it again as soon as there was an opportunity. Only the week before, two dozen of them got in on bicycles and roller skates and careened around the runway before they were nabbed—but not charged. They even got their bikes and skates back.

The British soldiers seemed friendly enough. Huddled by braziers at fifty-foot intervals inside the nine-mile perimeter, they appeared quite woebegone and, if alone, they greeted and talked readily to the women walking by. They were forbidden to talk, one of them said, or to listen to music or to smoke. He had only a ten-day tour of duty there and said that after just four days, with nothing to do for six more but sit in the mud looking out through the wire, he would almost prefer the Falklands. He was as eager for tidbits as any zoo animal. Another soldier was being assailed by a young Scottish visitor as I approached: "Don't you think it's too bad that you have to guard that Yank base from your own people?" The soldier shrugged. "Them from you; you from them," he said. "Same as Northern Ireland."

Some opposition to the campers has come from local residents, ranging from violence to fairly inscrutable pranks. Vigilantes have set fire to the gorse bushes, dumped maggots and pigs' blood on the benders. One day, RAGE (Ratepayers Against Greenham Encampment) hired three male stripteasers to perform near Blue Gate. Locals turned out and the police eventually stopped the show, but the women just ignored it. "What was the point of that?" was the question of the night.

On Bank Holiday Monday there was large-scale activity among the women, and charabancs of supporters arrived from across the country at Orange Gate with kites and pots of paint. Meetings were scheduled at distant clearings in the bushes to avoid being overheard by directional microphones, and while kites flew and got caught in the wire, women mixed paint and dressed in plastic bags. At 3 P.M. hundreds of them emerged from the wood and converged on the gate, long called "Orange" by them but just "L" by the authorities. Within minutes they made the gate worthy of their name for it, sloshing every conceivable shade of orange on the posts and wire as the police and soldiers inside gazed on bemused. Women held other women on their shoulders to reach the highest bits, others clapped and sang while up and down the road rainbows of color suddenly decorated the hideous fence, and on the road itself slogans, doves and peace signs appeared as far as the eye could see. It looked like the road to Oz. Police, too late, arrived in vans



and seized the leftover paint and brushes, hurling them over the barbed wire, making unintentional bright splotches of color inside the base.

That kind of action may do wonders for peace camp morale, but it achieves little beyond releasing tension and briefly humiliating the powerful. No TV cameras were there. The press has not turned up since April. But the women are not going anywhere. Neither, at this rate, are the cruises.

"They really ought to get out of here," said one woman who has come every weekend for more than two years, leaving her three children with her husband in Derbyshire. "And we're not moving until they do. We don't mind how long it takes. The newspapers may ignore us, but we're still here and the base knows we're still here. We've got too much commitment to give up now. I used to think of life as something merely nasty, British and short. It's nasty here all right, and not even particularly British, but for my children's sake I've got to do what I can to see that it isn't short." □

## THE STING F.B.I.-STYLE

# Crime in the Name of the Law

WILLIAM M. KUNSTLER

**O**n May 1 the Democratic majority of the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights issued a report on government "sting" operations which create or facilitate crimes in order to trap susceptible individuals. The representatives condemned the use of the tactic by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies. Citing a "pattern of widespread deviation from avowed standards with substantial harm to individuals," the panel called for legislation to force the Bureau and other law enforcement bodies to obtain court approval before planning and executing stings which, the report says, have the effect of "encouraging criminal activity." The report follows more than four years of investigation and twenty-one hearings concerning such elaborate stunts as Abscam and such narcotics trafficking traps as the one used to snare automaker John Z. DeLorean.

The first government-created crime to gain widespread public recognition was Abscam in 1979, which targeted one senator and six representatives. After convicted swindler Melvin Weinberg made the initial contacts, F.B.I. agents masquerading as Middle Eastern sheiks, replete with plush yachts, fashionable townhouses and phony businesses, offered substantial bribes to the legislators in return for promised favors. While many of the judges who presided at the subsequent trials expressed serious misgivings about the

techniques employed by the Bureau, only two dared to dismiss the cases before them as the product of entrapment. Those decisions were promptly reversed by intermediate appellate courts. All the Congressional defendants were eventually found guilty, and their convictions were upheld on appeal.

In December 1982, the Senate Select Committee to Study Undercover Activities of Components of the Department of Justice issued its final report on a number of similar sting operations conducted by the F.B.I., including three designated by the code names Frontload, Buyin and Labou. Like Abscam, those operations raise serious legal and moral issues, especially for a nation that professes to be committed to the highest principles of democracy. At the very least, they demonstrate the extreme danger that comes with entrusting too much unsupervised power to overzealous officers of the law.

In Frontload, Norman Howard, a white-collar criminal with an extensive record, played much the same role that Weinberg did in Abscam. The F.B.I. used Howard in connection with a 1978 investigation of organized-crime figures in construction projects financed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in New York and New Jersey—an operation that did not result in a single prosecution. The scenario called for Howard to act as the representative of a legitimate insurance company capable of writing bids and payment and performance bonds for construction projects. Furnished with a phony corporate seal and all the necessary forms, Howard wrote several million dollars in performance bonds which enabled the companies under scrutiny to bid successfully on a number of HUD projects. The issuance of those bonds not only made possible a number of serious crimes—including the defrauding of a school district and a state housing authority—but prompted lawsuits totaling \$343 million against the Federal government. Howard, who absconded with an estimated \$1 million in premiums he had collected, apparently will not be prosecuted for his theft.

Buyin involved an F.B.I. undercover agent posing as an employee of a California-based company that wanted to invest in a gambling enterprise, assuming that casino gambling and slot machines would soon be legalized in Washington State. In 1978 the agent met a lobbyist in Olympia who said he was sure the Speaker of the Washington House of Representatives and the majority leader in the State Senate would be willing to introduce and support the desired gambling bill, provided they were adequately compensated for their efforts. An introduction to the solons could be arranged, the lobbyist told the agent. In addition to a promised percentage of the profits from anticipated gambling revenues, the F.B.I. also offered, and paid, thousands of dollars to the lobbyist as a "consulting fee" and to the Speaker as a "campaign contribution." What made those bribes particularly galling was the fact that the lobbyist, the majority leader and the Speaker were secondary to the investigation, whose primary target was a city official suspected of accepting bribes to permit illegal gambling to operate openly. Despite the taxpayer money thrown away on this ridiculous effort, charges against the official were never proved, the

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