

# Carrying Greenham Home: The London Women's Peace Support Network

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## ABSTRACT

The women's peace camp at Greenham Common, Berkshire, England, has become an international symbol of women's resistance against the pervasiveness of nuclear arms. A core of permanent residents camp around the perimeter of the U.S. airbase, regularly challenge trespass laws, and frequently are arrested for "breaching the peace." The residents are supported by a large network of women from all over Britain who camp or visit on weekends, bring food and supplies, raise money, assist in special actions at the camp, and stage local demonstrations. This paper describes the network in London and its links with the camp, discusses problems with negative media images and the issue of women and peace.

The extent of world militarization is easier to deny for North Americans as our vast spaces permit false illusions of safety. Peace activism becomes even more plausible when weapons are literally on one's own doorstep and when the distances between the nuclear installations and the places where people live shrink to less than an hour's drive on the motorway.

In England the buildup of nuclear weapons, including Polaris submarines (to be replaced by the more sophisticated Tridents) and cruise and Pershing missiles, has been the major thrust of a NATO plan announced in 1979 to deploy nuclear weapons in Western Europe. R.A.F. Greenham Common, Berkshire, an air base of over a thousand acres only an hour's drive from London, was to be the site of 96 of the 464 land based cruise missiles. In August 1981, forty women (with a few men and children) calling themselves "Women for Life on Earth" marched 120 miles from Cardiff, Wales, to Greenham Common to protest the intended siting of the missiles. Hoping for media coverage of their protest, which was at first largely ignored, they chained themselves to the fence surrounding the perimeter of the base and then decided to stay and set up a permanent peace encampment.

The establishment and activities of the women-only peace camp has attracted a fair amount of publicity. A number of books written by "insiders" (Cook and Kirk; Jones; Harford and Hopkins), one by an "outsider" (Blackwood) and several magazine articles (for example, Gellhorn; Snitow) have dealt with camp life as the women see it, women's organizations, and the relationship of women to the larger society. The British press in contrast has (except for the *Guardian*) uniformly stressed the camp's dramatic, quirky or deviant as-

pects. If one were to rely solely on the media for information, Greenham would be thought of as a past phenomenon, another instance of the triumph of Big Government and overarching militarization. It is, however, still very much alive: a prime example of women's collective action, an important resistance movement that challenges the Law and the glib assumptions of British and international political systems. It also has been lauded as an arena for new forms of feminist consciousness and social organization (and been the object of some feminist criticism for diverting energy from challenges to male domination, and race and class issues, for example, *Breaching the Peace*, n.d.).

During my sabbatical year, 1983-1984 in London, I joined the local Greenham women's support group, attended meetings every two weeks and participated in actions. I was there primarily as an activist and not an academic, but was interested in women's collective action and resistance movements. It became increasingly clear that the camp at Greenham depended for its survival on the extensive network of women throughout England who supported its activities. During the following year I returned to Toronto but kept contact with several of the women. I decided to return to England the next spring to investigate more systematically the organization of the network. During a month long stay in May of 1985, I interviewed women group members, active and passive supporters in the peace movement, and participated in actions. I collected data on Greenham groups in London and built a clipping file of newspaper and magazine articles. This article, then, is based on a twelve month association with the Greenham women, split into two separate periods. It will deal with the nature of the peace camp and its London support system, focussing particularly on the organization and actions of one

group in North London. I am concerned with showing how the support groups are integrated with the camp, how women became involved, the dynamics of one action at the camp, and the socio-political implications of membership in the women's peace network.<sup>1</sup>

### The Camp

Much has been made of Greenham's nine mile fence. It is green wire, a high, rather solid looking structure, buttressed by concrete posts, and backed with rolls of barbed wire. The barren landscape inside has reminded visitors and journalists of a concentration camp or a graphic forecast of a postnuclear scene. The gates in the fence, several wide enough to accommodate large launching trucks transporting nuclear weapons out on practice missions or deployment exercises, are painted and named by the women for the colours of the rainbow.



*GREENHAM AT THE FENCE*, December 1985, from a collection by A. Burfoot, Brighton, England.

Blue, Green, Violet, Red, Yellow, Orange, Jade, Indigo, and Emerald Gates are now the foci, the signposts for the women's presence outside the stark construction. The fence at Orange Gate is extensively decorated with rainbows, women's symbols, webs, lovingly woven of rags and wool. Despite the ravages of British weather, the discoloured swatches enliven the flat green wire. Outside Yellow Gate, which is the main entrance to the base and the most populous permanent encampment, the women have planted gardens with flowers and seeds that will blossom; inside there is the sign which everyone photographs and which has become the cliché of the camp: Welcome to the R.A.F. Greenham Common (which everyone also knows should read U.S.A.F.). The women living outside these gates have a lower profile now that they can no longer construct "benders," temporary dwellings made of bent branches and blue polyethylene coverings, which pro-

vided clumsy but adequate protection against the winter. The local Newbury District Council's claim on the common land and a road widening project have resulted in constant evictions which have prevented anything more permanent than lean-tos made of a rope tied to trees, with a plastic thrown over it, or a pole supporting the same. Women's belongings, stored in baby carriages and boxes, become as mobile as the possessions of the most marginal nomadic peoples. The (vegetarian) food kept in plastic milk crates is moved, then dragged back again when the bailiffs leave after their morning raids.

The fence, an actual and symbolic separation between the world of women and the world of men, has been picked at, cut, and sliced open by the women and is now a patchwork of double fencing after numerous repairs. Movements onto the base by the women are a regular activity, designed to show how little the barrier means, how terrorists could, if they wanted, have access to the most terrifying innards of the nuclear arsenal. When I first joined a Greenham support group in September 1983, wire (or bolt) cutters were a major focus of interest, discussion, and joking. The merits and problems of specific ones were known and shared as cultural lore. Shopkeepers who did not question their purchase in bulk or who cast a knowing eye became silent conspirators in the antinuclear effort. Bolt cutters remain a treasured item (decent ones costing about £ 13) handy for trespasses and weakening the other's all pervasive power. Testimony are the pieces of fence which litter the ground around the perimeter of the base, to be retrieved and taken away as amulets by visitors and supporters like myself who want to be part of the small but sweet resistance.

The peace camp itself has a fluctuating population—sometimes fewer than 20 during winter months, swelling on weekends to perhaps 100 as the weather becomes milder. The summers draw many more from other parts of Europe and elsewhere. Women have different motives for being there. Many have come because they are deeply committed to the peace issue, others for a retreat from British society, still others needing a haven or women's space. They are young women with spiked hair or shaved heads, mothers with children in tow, older women who could be social workers or librarians, professionals who have dropped out.

The well-to-do residents of the local town of Newbury have fought against the camp and a number have formed R.A.G.E. (Ratepayers Against Greenham Encampments), although there are a few who offer the women a refuge for baths and tea. The tabloid media has been caustic in its labelling of the Greenham women as freaky, lesbian, dirty, noisy, causing



*DORA RUSSELL* at Greenham Common, December 1985 (just before she died), from A. Burfoot collection.

tumult and bedlam and, has capitalized on the sensational aspects of the camp rather than on the continual, solid acts of resistance that characterize everyday activities. An egregious headline—*The Wild Women of Peace Brought Mayhem to Greenham Common Missile Base Yesterday*—appeared on the front page of the *Sun*, December 12, 1983. The press have also sent spies to infiltrate. One Sarah Bond covertly spent three days at Greenham in order to write a story for the *Daily Express*. She was convinced the women were a front for a plot to destroy British nuclear defenses. Another female reporter dressed in her self-styled “lesbian outfit” and attended a local support group meeting to write an “inside” story on the planning of an action. The women themselves, however, are ambivalent about the media. They want honest coverage yet, anticipating hostility, they are not always forthcoming when questioned about their life style. The media, in turn, feel frustrated and show lack of empathy; hence the circle which encourages each to mistrust the other.

Despite the negative reactions, the Greenham women continue to play with their image. They cut through the fence daily, cycle, roller-skate and picnic inside the base. They have painted planes and runways, sabotaged equipment, padlocked a gate to keep the soldiers in, had a Hallowe’en party in costume (witches, of course) and danced on the missile silos on New Year’s Eve. They clap and sing in court and prison, creating “disturbances” and “breaching the peace,” making a mockery of formal proceedings. The consequences of these actions have been frequent arrests (over 2,000 women are reported to be in prison now) and fines but rarely physical abuse. The police have been warned about creating martyrs

among the women or giving them too much publicity. Defense Secretary Heseltine’s remark in November 1983 that he would defend installations even at the risk of shooting protesters was met with an enormous public outcry as women feel a kind of immunity with regard to retaliation. Although they delight in countering authority they are deadly serious about the process of nonviolent direct action and the goal of ridding society of nuclear weapons and ultimately the patriarchal institutions that create them. Camp women are frequent travellers to, or invited speakers at, peace conferences where, as “real” Greenham women, they have achieved a kind of status.

### The London Support Network

The meager numbers of permanent residents at the camp belie the actual resources that are available and can be mobilized very quickly through women’s support groups throughout the country. London alone has about twenty support groups of varying sizes, with women of different degrees of active involvement. The groups are now loosely organized under the umbrella organization, London Greenham Women, which meets monthly at a spartan office in an all-women’s building in Islington.<sup>2</sup> The larger meetings are a way of keeping in touch with what different groups and individuals are doing and to plan actions at the camp and in London. Blue gate produces the camp newsletter based on meeting minutes and incorporating camp news, other women’s peace bulletins, and notes about actions done and those planned. The women are becoming increasingly concerned about using the telephone while planning actions as they fear phone taps. They sense the political climate becoming more hostile and authorities more threatened by “conspiratorial acts.” The office is covered by volunteers answering the telephone and mail during the week. The gift of an answering machine in May 1985, by the husband of one active woman was to have eased the taking of messages, but shortly after its acquisition the machine was stolen. This caused considerable consternation, and was especially problematic since it is an all women building. The security in the building which was kept locked at all times, is now less likely to be trusted.

The Greenham support groups in London are neighbourhood based, meeting either biweekly or weekly at community centers or women’s centers. They might call themselves Greenham support groups such as the Putney Greenham Support Group or the Camden Greenham Women (formerly Camden Women Against Cruise), or by more general names such as the Greenwich Women’s Peace Collective or the Brent Anti-Nuclear Group. The membership figures of the groups fluctuate, most having a small core who attend regularly and

a larger unit which can be called upon for actions at the camp and in London.

Support groups tend to be homogeneous in colour and class, (white and middle) but greatly diverse with regard to age, occupation, personality, sexual preference, reasons for joining, motivation for continuing membership. Anecdotes that women pass on tell of these differences in affectionate ways. In one story, a support woman camping on the weekend at Greenham, crawled out of her sleeping bag after a cold, wet night and put her green eye makeup on. In another, a usually well-groomed woman sat on a stool in the middle of the bender in her designer raincoat.

The camp, then, depends not only on its permanent residents but on the large network of women who live elsewhere, who may work, have family or relationship involvements, be students, yet are committed to the camp's continued existence. They may go up to Greenham for days, weekends and for special actions, spend holidays there, contribute for fines and other expenses, plan and carry out actions in the city. Support groups seem to identify themselves with and stay at a specific gate and, when visiting Greenham, bring food and other supplies.

A number of women became involved with Greenham after being members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the largest peace organization in Britain. Some women left the organization claiming it was male dominated and hierarchical. Others felt that CND was badly in need of focus which Greenham provided. But many others see the importance of maintaining links with, as well as numbers in, the national peace organization and either still attend meetings or remain inactive but on the rosters. CND is frequently described by support group women as consisting of more conservative peace workers who are more accepting of authority, both external and internal.

Many women trace the inspiration for their interest in Greenham to the "encirclement," a dramatic surrounding of the nine mile fence in December 1982. The "encirclement" was an extremely well publicized event which drew 30,000 women (double the number expected). It was intended that the women surround the base to symbolize the surrounding of the evils of war, a countering of violence with love (Harford and Hopkins, p. 92).

Sympathizers as well as nonsupporters were impressed with the efficient organization of the Greenham actions on December 12 and 13. In preparation for one of the earliest mass actions, the blockade of the base on December 13, 1982,

women were encouraged to organize into small groups of about ten in which they would get to know each other forming a basis for trust and mutual support.

Women...organized firewood, water supplies, food, toilets, car parks, road signs, a creche, legal lawyers.... They had produced a booklet with a map of the base, details about facilities available, notes about nonviolence, legal information, songs, and a programme for the two days. Everyone who took part in the blockade...registered with a coordinating group and was briefed about the action. Some women had been meeting beforehand and a few groups had already taken direct action together. The majority, however, had never had a similar experience. Women who did not know each other joined into groups. Each person had a role to play and became immediately involved. The legal implications of the blockade were discussed. Anyone who did not want to be arrested knew that she could take a supporting role or, if blockading, that she could move out of the way when cautioned by the police. (Cook and Kirk, p. 46)

Women drew strength from their massive numbers, the intense feeling of community and purpose, and from song. The events of these days stimulated networks throughout the country, gave new energy to groups already begun; others were starting and Greenham was becoming an international media phenomenon. The encirclement was the inspiration for Peggy Seeger's song, *Carry Greenham Home*.

Hand in hand, the line extends,  
All around the nine mile fence.  
Thirty thousand women chant,  
Bring the message home.  
Carry Greenham home, yes  
Nearer home and far away,  
Carry Greenham home.

Carrying Greenham home, away from the camp has been a theme and an organizational focus as well as a rationale for those who might otherwise feel guilty for not becoming permanent campers.

The arrival of cruise became a focus for the British women's peace movement. Ninety-six out of a total of 464 missiles for Europe were to be sited at Greenham Common (the others to be at Molesworth in Cambridgeshire, Comiso in Italy, and in Holland, Belgium, and West Germany). The base made a 50 to 100 mile radius particularly vulnerable: the whole area of Greater London. The peace camp at Greenham was to be symbolic and actual opposition to the missiles, a source of

information about practice missions, alerts, the operation of the base, the contrast between the outside and inside, women's culture vs. men's culture, military solutions vs. peaceful ones. Women were there to provide a link so that the secrets of the inside would be more available to the public. The trespassing actions were to show how easy it was to penetrate security, how easy it would be for terrorists to have access to the most advanced military technology and organization of the U.S. run airbase. Support women planned actions in their local areas. They organized marches in mourning dress, wrote letters, set up local peace camps, held die-ins, blockaded roads and bases, keened in front of the Houses of Parliament.

### One Local Group

"My" local support group had begun in the spring of 1983 and is still known as one of the most active. The group circulated a newsletter providing information about the camp, arrests, court cases, fines and actions. They arranged for a peace bus to travel throughout a London borough, distributing leaflets and creating awareness of the existence of the group and of the issues. When I joined in September, spirits were high. The membership had been growing during the year and by the fall the telephone tree had two branches. At one point almost 40 women would crowd into a small room in a neighbourhood women's center for the biweekly meetings.

We were convinced that we could prevent cruise from coming to Greenham. I recall the discussions of possible creative actions to sabotage the delivery of the weapons. I recall, too, the dreadful feelings of defeat when a number of missiles arrived on the morning of November 14, 1983. Attention, however, soon turned to a new effort—that of preventing cruise from leaving the base for deployment exercises. Road blockades were planned; telephone trees were now used to inform supporters of nighttime forays of launcher trucks.

Women at the camp set up night watches to inform the support network of the nature and direction of the convoys. Support women provided additional labour for the night watches and planned the blockading of major roads to prevent launcher exercises. To lift their spirits, women planned an emotional anniversary to commemorate the original encirclement.

At the encirclement of December 11, 1983, women held mirrors pointed towards the base, to reflect its own evil back on itself. The numbers of women exceeded that of the previous year—almost 50,000.

Undeniably, however, there was a sense of defeat because the women were unable to prevent the coming of cruise to Greenham. Some felt resignation, others increasing tension. A growing number of problems had beset the group during the first months of 1984, ranging from inadequate meeting space and inability to locate permanently to disagreements among members with regard to several major issues—the nature of the group, attitudes towards nonviolence, the focus on peace vs. feminism. Some members felt that the group should enlarge the political scope of its activities to include giving aid to the striking miners and dealing with issues of poverty and sexism. Others felt that this would weaken or diffuse the energy needed in the anticruise battle. Another division fell along sexual orientation lines. Some of the lesbians (the group was and still is about half and half) claimed that the heterosexuals were paranoid about being dominated by lesbians, and jealous that the lesbians were a closer, more cohesive group. Some heterosexual women felt that a few of the lesbians were embarrassingly demonstrative at inappropriate times, thereby providing negative images to the public, and were primarily involved in Greenham because it provided a women's space and only secondarily for the peace issues. The group held a workshop in the spring of 1983 to discuss some of these problems and participants felt unanimously positive about its usefulness. It cleared the air and served to clarify individual perspectives. Some women decided to leave the group and start a new one (which has yet to be formed) in which colour and class issues would be given more attention. A core group of eight remained and reaffirmed their commitment to the peace movement, and at a later date planned a number of actions at the base and in London. In one action 22 women "borrowed" a bus inside the base, drove around and picked up women at different points. They had begun to cut through the inside fence when they were arrested and a trial date set. After a three-day hearing in December, the women were found not guilty by an all-women jury. The action was applauded as "brilliant" by other women; the retelling has been the source of some glee, particularly as it demonstrated the faulty security at the airbase. Another, more sedate, action was a march in mourning dress at Euston station on a busy holiday-Friday night. The women wore placards saying "Who killed the Human Race?" and carried a wooden coffin. The women have also raised money for fines by running stalls, selling cards and buttons at theatres, fairs and festivals.

Other support groups have also been active since the coming of cruise and despite lulls and doldrums have continued to meet and plan activities. Apart from booths at fairs, singing in front of local supermarkets, leafletting, holding Bread-not-

Bombs picnics, visiting Greenham women in prison, organizing videos and local exhibitions, the women think of ingenious ways to focus attention on the peace issues. One group erected a "Greenham fence" on their local high street. Another active group supports a women's school in Tigray, Ethiopia, sending huge crates of clothing and household needs, in addition to financial support. All groups regularly visit Greenham and do night watches, not only to monitor cruise's whereabouts but also to protect the women against vigilante raids.<sup>3</sup>

### A Greenham Action: Camp and Support Women Together

In a recent action on May 25, 1985, during my return visit to England, large numbers of women were to trespass on the base in order to create mass arrests and chaos. This was planned for Women's International Day of Disarmament, in solidarity with Ann Francis, (a vicar's wife who was arrested and imprisoned for a year—an outrageous length of time for trespassing) as well as a test of the new law that made trespassing a criminal offense. The intentions were that women would come to the base, cut through the fence and be arrested but not give any names, which would cause endless confusion. When they wanted to be released they had only to supply name—even a false one. The action was not reported in the newsletter nor communicated on telephone trees, and no busses were arranged. I was quite skeptical about its success, as few women outside the active support network seemed to know about it. However, when the day arrived, women seemed to be coming from all directions and numbers were no problem. The action was a prime example of decentralized spontaneous organizing and word-of-mouth communication.

My group decided to meet in a circle to plan our particular strategy for the break-in. As a support person, I went with them to a clearing near Orange Gate. A., a member of another group but well-known to my group, came to tell us of an independent film crew that had come to Greenham hoping to record the day's events. She asked how the women felt about being filmed. The reaction was negative and A. left to tell the filmmakers. One woman suggested that individuals express their feelings about the action. The air was filled with tension as J., previously one of the more resolute about the action, was now saying that she had decided not to go through with it. There was a job possibility, she explained, and being arrested with a court date to follow might jeopardize her chances for it. Her teenage daughter, who had come with her for the first time, wanted to participate in the action. As we went around the circle, each woman expressed her point of view. Some were keen, others fearful. D., a woman who was at the meeting, was not a group member and was unknown to

the other women. She expressed concern about not having family or friends who would notice if she were arrested and missing. C. and B. welcomed her to be part of the group. Several other strange women came and sat down outside the circle, not realizing it to be a particular group's meeting. They were asked who they were (they were from North England) and told that it was a local strategy meeting not open to outsiders. Concern was expressed about the large size of the group as well as the problem of sharing information with nonmembers. The outside women stayed within the circle briefly and then left (it was later heard that they got into the base without problem and were arrested earlier than our group). J. decided to be a support person to stay at the base for a few days, camping outside the fence. I was afraid to be arrested and leery of missing my flight home. I said that I felt very much a coward for not being able to participate in the action or do much more than emotionally support it. Group members were very supportive and nonjudgemental and one felt a strong sense of respect regardless of individual decisions.

We left with several pairs of bolt cutters which, it was decided, would be left at the point of entry to be recovered the next day by J. The thirteen of us (a rather large group for a covert action) walked around through the wooded area, looking for likely places to cut through the fence and cross over onto the base. Police, however, with their dogs, were everywhere. C. walked off to look for possibilities and was soon chastised by the women for going alone. Bogs to jump across and the farmer's private land made for an adventuresome walk which was interrupted by frequent whoops coming from the direction of the base—victory sounds when women managed to get in. Finally, a road with a car. N. spoke to the woman driver, who told her of a vulnerable spot in the fence. The others went to search for it and I said my goodbyes and headed back to Orange Gate. A. was there with the film crew. She said that she had found a large hole in the fence which was disguised by a patch over it, hanging on the barest wire hinges. They intended to go back to it after they diverted the police. We walked slowly towards the hole, trying not to look too suspicious. A. removed the patch and jumped onto the base, followed by several other women, all with gay abandon for the camera. They quickly jumped out again when the police inside were spotted heading for the fence opening. It was at that point that I saw "my" group whooping inside. We waved vigorously as they were loaded onto riot vans. We later heard from one of the women arrested that they were taken to the Reading police station, and in a few days to court to hear the charges. It was decided in advance that the women would refuse to give any names and would hold out as long as possible. When they wanted to be released they would offer a false name and in this way retain control over the situation.

The names invented—Whistle Woman, Dungarees, Blossom, Yellow Coat, Freda Peoples, Karen Silkwood—provided amusement for the women, especially when the authorities reacted with a straight face to even the most bizarre ones. The women who refused to give any names were separated into groups and sent to prisons all over the Thames Valley where they were detained for a week. Women who were arrested or sent to prison report that treatment by the police was not excessively punitive although there were problems about obtaining water, the lack of vegan food, and feeling cold. (Longer prison terms have been reported as intensely negative, isolating experiences. Harford and Hopkins, p. 106-112) They speak of the dignity with which all the women handled this situation, their courage and clearheadedness. The action was seen as successful even though numbers reported in the papers and by the BBC were far below the actual arrests made (over 300). This reinforced the women's mistrust of the media, and it functioned to reinvigorate those women whose energies had been flagging.

### Women and Peace

Almost all the women I have spoken to are very clear about the importance of Greenham's remaining a women's peace camp for a number of reasons: organizational, symbolic and strategic. Women are seen as more spontaneous, less concerned with hierarchy and organization, able to make decisions by consensus. In *Greenham Women Everywhere*, (p. 72) Viv Wynant explains the difference between majority decision-making and consensus. In the former "a situation is defined to start with us a choice between a limited number of options. These options are framed as two or three competing points of view and everyone chooses between them." In this way "options become polarized and fixed [and] those who 'lose' the vote have no place in the final outcome." In consensus decision-making "everyone has the opportunity—some would say responsibility—to say what they think. As each person speaks, everyone's understanding of the situation deepens. The discussion is continually redefined and reworked to assimilate each person's ideas and feelings...the fluctuating process of reaching a decision includes everyone.... No one side 'wins,' but a cooperative decision emerges, based on everyone's ideas and understanding."

Women who were skeptical during the early months of the camp are now confident that it is viable as a women-only place with men bringing up firewood and helping with creches at large actions or providing financial support. Certain happenings, such as the recent surprise vigilante attack, continue to convince many women that male presence would only increase this kind of hostility. Moreover, there is a safety

factor: since men are never there at night, women would immediately know that one is an intruder. It is also felt that men tend to respond to police violence with violence and are less able to use nonviolent direct action. They are seen as being more comfortable with hierarchical structures, leadership, organized decision-making, and as regarding the women's consensual democracy as inefficient and ineffective. A women-only camp is also seen as likely to attract more attention from the media.

The women interviewed did not reduce the women-peace relationship to simple biology but, rather, to socialization. Women are socialized to be more flexible, spontaneous, cooperative; men more competitive. Although it is not seen as innate, women are thought to be the pacifists because of their closer link with children and the need to protect the continuity of the generations.<sup>4</sup> Women are concerned that if men were present at the camp, women would be diverted, defer to them, and thus divide their loyalties between male and female friends.<sup>5</sup> Men would want to protect women—they learn this as one of their major life tasks. Women want to develop their own confidence and independence, qualities which have been undermined in a society which supports male-female bonding.

Greenham's gender exclusivity remains a real problem for some and an impediment to the involvement of long-time peace movement members in Britain. They feel that the women's claim on pacifism is unfair and erroneous, and that empathetic men within the movement as well as potential supporters are being alienated.

### AND NOW?—Resistance and Change

What began as a small peace camp to prevent the coming of cruise missiles to Greenham is now a powerful international phenomenon with an extensive web of relationships. Greenham has been well manipulated by the women as an anti-establishment, anarchistic symbol of resistance. What appeared to be merely an expressive movement begun by the small group from Wales five years ago is now clearly a thorn in the side of the American and British military, a constant reminder that they cannot forge ahead with secret deployment exercises, defense drills and new technology without the constant presence, and the hue and cry of, watchful women.

The evictions at the camp increase, the arrests as well, as do violent encounters. The poor and inadequate media coverage (lack of interest or editorial suppression?) raises the question of effectiveness of actions when the public does not hear of them. The women are tired and are not always receptive to

well-meaning visitors who ask them if they "need anything." Lulls have been caused by the winter weather and the involvement in other causes such as the miners' strike which involved much of a year. There have been changes—women are less likely to use telephone trees. They have become increasingly suspicious and are more likely to rely on word-of-mouth. Many support women feel less welcomed as they come on a weekend to camp or for the day to bring firewood, water, or simply to connect with their gates. Some have said that they do not enjoy camping at Greenham since the permanent residents make them feel guilty for maintaining "normal" lives. Women with children say that they are not given much help or understanding by those who are without dependents and can move their place of residence more freely.

With the coming of spring and summer, however, there always appears to be new energy. Actions are being planned, issues are being readdressed. There are attempts to offset the problem of declining numbers by urging women to come regularly for one weekend a month for the next year in order to create a revival of interest and new integration between the permanent residents and the supporters.

Greenham, then, has been a focus for the peace movement in Britain. It has played a vital role in clarifying individual commitment to the peace cause and intensifying political consciousness. Women who have never been involved with formal politics, who would not describe themselves as political people, are now deeply involved in learning about power and confrontation, about the worldwide links between industrialism and militarism, sexism, capitalism and the nuclear state, poverty, class problems. The relationship between the coal pit closures and the building of nuclear arsenals became clear as the coal strike persisted, as did the link between the British government's economic policies and world capitalism. The women speak of these issues with intense political awareness very conscious of their own role in creating or expressing a radical view. In addition to women being politicized with regard to broader issues, the judicial process, the innards of arrests, court struggles, bail, prisons and the intricacies of legal interpretation are becoming as familiar as the insides of one's kitchen.

Greenham is also seen by the women as the focus of the women's movement in Britain, providing safety and harbour as well as political articulation. Women have found communion with others, emotional support, confidence, and strength in their differences. Y. told a story of the thirteen-year old daughter of a friend, both at Greenham for the weekend. They had gone on a walk around the base and the daughter drifted away, an apparently unusual act for this particular

girl. The mother and companion were desperate to find her, which they did eventually, sitting at Red gate decorating the fence. The girl had felt so comfortable at Greenham that her departure from her mother did not seem a strange idea. Another woman described Greenham to me as her spiritual home. A third, never having visited Greenham, said she would be "very sad" were it not to exist anymore, since if anything happened to alter her life, she is comforted to know that it is there.



GREENHAM, "A COUNTERING OF VIOLENCE WITH LOVE," A. Burfoot collection.

Women define Greenham as their place, the source of a special strength where "they can be themselves." The women there are "very ordinary... You feel like you can make a contribution to something which is, however, not ordinary." "It makes women think about themselves, gives them a voice and a purpose." "You come away with revival, a lifted spirit." "When you go to Greenham you are changed." "The whole point," as one woman said, "is to take Greenham home."

#### NOTES

1. The women in the support network and particularly in one group have been very welcoming to me. Their openness in sharing ideas, information, affection, food and rides has been extraordinary and much appreciated. I have not used names in order to protect individual, as well as group, privacy. They will know who they are when I say a special "thank you."
2. The original office in London was also used to house camp women who wanted some time away. The camp women were doing office work and apparently built up large phone bills. The London Greenham women now have a separate bank account from that of the camp.
3. Local hooligans have put maggots in food and blood on clothing at the camp. Several months ago some women were attacked at night and one had to go to hospital. The women claim that just prior to the attack, the base lights, which always glare in the dark, had gone out, and feel that the police themselves may have had something to do with the incident. Night watches are now seen as an essential defense.

4. The protection of children and future generations is the basis of their reason to rid the world of nuclear arms which is the source of some feminist criticism.
5. One woman reports that at Molesworth, a mixed camp, women are still doing the dishwashing, which is thought to be evidence that men are not ready for a really cooperative effort.

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## To Bristol

If I could give  
 you all  
 my love  
 I would wish you  
 sweet sorrel to eat  
 and moss  
 between your shoulderblades;  
 I would wish you  
 a bed of ginger  
 the wind  
 across your skin  
 the sun  
 along your thighs.

I would feed you  
 fireweed,  
 and salmonberries  
 for your thirst  
 rub your skin  
 with mint  
 and watercress  
 let you swim in  
 mountain lakes  
 and hold you then  
 to warm you.

I would place pebbles  
 on your chest  
 for you to feel  
 their smoothness  
 I would put honey  
 on your lips

and find feathers  
 beneath swallows' nests  
 to stroke your eyes.

Your hair I'd comb  
 with seashells  
 or the backbone  
 of a trout;  
 your neck I'd  
 string with cedar scales  
 hung with  
 my threaded hair;  
 Your wrists  
 I'd wrap  
 with grasses  
 plait them through  
 with valerian  
 for  
 your heart  
 to move with mine

Your hands  
 I'd place  
 on my warm breasts  
 and let your fingers  
 find their heat  
 I'd cup your palms  
 and give you  
 milk to drink  
 with  
 thickened lips.

I'd kiss you then  
 and stroke you  
 twine my hair  
 in strands  
 about you  
 take my hands  
 and hold you;  
 feel the crests  
 of your hips, how  
 your belly  
 hollows.  
 How your hands  
 now hold me too  
 how your  
 eyes are  
 silver hued  
 how we part  
 the flowers  
 and their blossoms  
 blue  
 above us  
 enclose us  
 to the sky.

And I  
 would listen  
 to how we breath  
 and how  
 we sigh.

Diana Thompson  
 Salt Spring Island