

The Womens Gate at the Aldermaston Blockade

15 February 2010

We really feel our action was worthwhile, it achieved no less than we had anticipated, and was even fun! We were around 40 women in total, with probably 30 present at any given time. We arrived by 6.45 am for a 7.00 am sit-down. It was dark, but luckily not raining or snowing. We moved straight in, and sat across the wide gate for an hour, watched by a large contingent of police, while the base traffic built up on the road. At 8.00, on the dot, they began to lift us off the tarmac and place us on the grass verge, to allow the waiting vehicles to enter the base.

Mysteriously, however, the flow of traffic down the public road towards the gate had now stopped completely. Why? Because the serious action of our blockade was now going on fifty yards back along the main road in either direction. Here, we had quietly and efficiently achieved very hard-to-shift lock-ons involving women with their arms secured in metal pipes and blocks of concrete. Three women (Ippy, Julia and Kay) lay across the road blocking access to the base from the south, and three more (Lou, Liz and Sue) were blocking access from the north. They prevented any traffic entering or exiting the gate from 7 am till 10 am. Four women from NVDA-no-to-NATO (Almudena and Zoe from Spain, Anna from Belgium and Marian from Germany) had also by now successfully locked themselves in a picturesque array around a heavy metal drum, right in the main entrance to the gate.

We therefore continued to be able to sit and stand in the road, while the police did an exemplary, painstaking and careful even caring job of drilling and cutting the prone women out of their restraints. They gave the women goggles, face masks and ear-muffs while they used their noisy cutting gear, and continually enquired about their wellbeing. Some of us believe that the local police force may have permitted us to achieve these lock-ons uninterrupted in order to be able to use them as a training exercise for less experienced officers belonging to forces from outside the area. In general, the police appeared to wish to make a better public impression than had been the case at recent Climate Change demonstrations, where there were complaints of police violence.

Eventually the gate was entirely freed from the peaceful but annoying impediment of womens bodies. But we lined the side of the road for another few hours, penned in by lines of police, demonstrating our messages to the passing cars. Our agreed themes were good and clear. In different words the various banners and placards said: Women say cut spending on nuclear weapons, not on public services, and No to male violence, no to military violence, no to all violence. One long strip-banner on

the fence proclaimed in large letters Women in Black : No War, there was a WILPF banner, and one referred to our new initiative, the <womenagainstnato> e-list, with the words Women say No to NATO! This was held by Mairead Maguire, a Nobel Peace Prize winner from Northern Ireland - who dropped it only as she got carried away, upside down, by the police. She and our other Nobel winner, Jodi Williams (of the landmine ban) were a great encouragement to us at the Womens Gate, and exerted a strong attraction on the media. Ros, Morag and Maggie from Raised Voices choir distributed song-sheets, and kept up a flow of cheerful protest songs for much of the morning. They were later joined by Camilla and friend with a trombone and a trumpet.

The police arrested six of us, and only those who had locked-on. They did not arrest the NVDA-against-NATO group who, when cut free, were permitted to walk away. Of those arrested, none were charged. Two women were cautioned, while four (those most habitually active around Aldermaston base) were released on police bail on condition of not returning to the area for three months. Nobody was harmed. Elsewhere around the five-mile Aldermaston fence, the Big Blockade closed all seven gates of the Atomic Weapons Establishment for different periods of time that day, and obtained considerable media coverage for our urgent demand: stop this illogical, immoral and foolhardy investment in 'modernization' of a genocidal weapon. The ensuing couple of days we from the Womens Gate have been putting out press releases and photos, to make good use of all the hard work, thoughtfulness and courage that so many women put into the blockade. Some photos of the Womens Gate blockade can be seen on the website <www.wloe.org> and we hope more will soon be available on <www.womeninblack.org>. Cynthia, London, 16.2.10.