

The value of land is created by the community . . .

# Land and liberty and the nuclear campaigners

**P**EACE movements, if they are to make progress, must realise that the success of their cause is tied up with the right of the individual to enjoy equal right of access to land.

Evictions from peace camps in England, like the evictions in civil rights disputes in the U.S.A. illustrate the point.

The story of Greenham Common in England began in 1981, when ten women and children set off from a nuclear weapons plant in Cardiff, Wales, for the USAF base – one of the sites chosen for the installation of 96 Cruise missiles.

The media ignored the women, who decided to set up a "peace camp" on the common.

It was a new way to work for peace. Tents, tepees, constant cold, damp, dismal surroundings, greasy lukewarm washing water did not deter them from their vigil.

The goal of the women was an enormous one. One woman said: "What we want to change is immense. It is not just getting rid of nuclear weapons, it's getting rid of the whole structure that created problems of nuclear weapons. If we get rid of nuclear weapons, and yet retain the same political structure, we're going to end up with something just as bad."

But the local Newbury Council did not agree. The Mayor found these "invaders" a nuisance. "We have had a good relationship with the military until these women came", he said.

When questioned by a PBS reporter from America, the Mayor could comment only that the women were "dirty, lived under disagreeable conditions", and that they had brought disfavour on the character of the community.

By May 1981, the council convinced the authorities to evict the camp. The main pavilion was destroyed by bulldozers. One hundred police and six bailiffs helped to pull down the camp. Five women were arrested and were fined £25 (\$30) or a week in jail.

A new camp has now been established on land out of the jurisdiction of the eviction order, but only a few yards away from the old camp.

—ROBERT SCROFANI—

writes from  
San Francisco

The camp is under the constant threat of eviction and on occasion, the police have come to clear the area. But the women constantly return.

Their liberty is linked to the land.

**R**OBERT Tideman, a San Francisco educator and economist whose daughter taught in a Mississippi Freedom School, tells a story that illustrates the relevance of the land question to the civil rights and peace movements.

He says: "Look what happened to one of our local girls, Gretchen Schwartz". She was arrested twice in two days in Drew, Mississippi during the 1960s. She was attending a rally outside the Holly Grove Baptist Church. Police arrived at the rally with a deacon of the church, who ordered them to leave.

"They then moved to a nearby vacant lot, whereupon the police brought the white woman who owned the property, who told them to leave. When the group moved into the street, they were arrested.

"Of what value is the right to assemble peaceably if there is no access to a spot of land on which to stand and be heard?

"The equal right to use 'public'

facilities – for which we all pay taxes – is clear. Whatever challenge may be made on grounds of private property, this challenge cannot be made where the property is publicly owned".

There are many people who say that neither the Negroes in the South nor the 800 young "freedom riders" who poured into Mississippi that fateful summer in the 60s should have been there. Or, they argue, that they were interfering in a distant and complex problem.

There are many in England who agree with the Mayor of Newbury, that the women of Greenham, who come from all over Europe, are a "nuisance" and should not be there.

"I do not share that view", says Tideman. The only way to gain and hold one's rights is to exercise them. When the right to travel and speak is challenged, the only remedy is to accept the challenge, go there and be heard.

When a contemporary of Tom Paine said "Where freedom is, there is my country", Paine responded "Where freedom is not, there is mine".

In the spirit of Paine, the young freedom riders of the American Civil Rights Movement and the women of Greenham have taken up the challenge.

**W**HILE Tideman supports these challenges to freedom, he believes that these issues call for a sharper focus on the land question.

## The price of protest

CIRCUS ponies graze on 1.6 acres on the edge of Molesworth cruise missile base, in Cambridgeshire, writes Ian Barron.

As the grass grows under their feet, so the price of the land has increased by leaps and bounds.

The sale of the site has led to civil action in the British High Court, as the Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has sought to stop the Church of England selling to the Ministry of Defence.

Christian CND, which is trying to outbid the Ministry, wants to use the site as a place of witness against cruise missiles.

This is how *The Guardian* chronicled the escalation in price:

● On March 9, the Defence Ministry's bid was reported to be £1,400, which was £700 less than that of Christian CND.

● On April 9, the Ministry's bid had risen to £3,385 – with the Christian campaigners offering a

£1,000 bonus on top of that.

Several court appearances were made, in attempts to stop the sale to the Defence Ministry. One argument: the General Synod of the Church of England had condemned "first use" of nuclear weapons, and cruise missiles were part of NATO first use policy.

Meanwhile, as the row rages and the price keeps going up, George Smith's circus ponies keep on munching that grass.

## ... it is our common inheritance; it belongs to us'

"After the Negroes won their right for equal access to the streets and sidewalks, they still remain locked out of most of their own state. The vacant lot next to the Holly Grove Baptist Church is only one of the 146,000 vacant lots in Mississippi from which they could have been evicted by the police on the call of the landholder.

"And beyond the vacant lots are vast underpopulated and underused areas, withheld from meeting the legitimate needs of both blacks and landless whites".

The common from which the women of Greenham were evicted is but a fraction of the land in a country where unemployment is over 13% and where vast tracts of urban land remain locked away from the people.

The civil rights and peace movements must realise that confiscating money from the poor by way of sales taxes, or from the industrious by way of income and other taxes, is as much an invasion of liberty as it is to close a public park, street or commons to the people.

The value of land, which is created by the community, is our common inheritance and belongs to all of us. It should be used to relieve all of us from the arbitrary tax burdens on labour and trade.

*Only then will we have liberty and the prospect of world peace.*

● The author is chairman of the history department, Berkeley High School, California.



● Police clear the area – but the women return.

Photo: KEITH HAMMETT

# Cruise and land values

THE EBB and flow of land prices in response to military policies is nicely illustrated by the property market around Greenham Common, Berkshire, one of the Home Counties west of London.

An anonymously published pamphlet, *At Least Cruise is Clean*,\* chronicles the way in which landowners gain and lose as a result of the subtle shifts in military strategy.

● In February 1978, the citizens of nearby Newbury were told that the airbase was to be home of the KC135s, the military version of the Boeing 707.

These giants act as flying petrol tankers – and they cause ear-splitting noise when taking to the air.

House prices at the top end of the market would collapse by 20%, according to one report, with forecasts of a £1m drop in the value of houses.

A side-effect of a high noise corridor would be that the planning authorities would be obliged to restrict the construction of new houses – thereby hitting local land speculators.

PROPERTY owners were furious, and the KC135s were eventually banned from Greenham Common.

● In June 1980, the good folk of Newbury were told that Cruise missiles would be flown in from the United States and located on the nearby base.

The then Defence Minister, Francis Pym, announced that over £16m would be spent in Berkshire in connection with the programme.

*Land values soared.* For the area around the base would no longer be subjected to large-scale flying by the noisy planes.

The speculators went to work, buying up tracts in areas where the USAF personnel would have to live.

Landlords charged American families rents of £225 to £300 a month for houses – well above customary levels.

To try and meet local housing needs, the council was forced to pay £4m to speculators for land that they had cornered.

The price of an acre of building land in West Berkshire is now over £250,000 (£300,000). This is £20,000 on the price of

a first purchase house, which is four times higher than the price of land in, say, Milton Keynes, one of the New Towns near London.

ONE BLOT on this landscape, however, was the arrival of the women who decided to camp outside Greenham Common in protest at the missiles.

Local homeowners decided that this reduced their property values by 20%. The local authorities appeared to agree with them, for nine homeowners had their property tax reduced by up to 7½%.

Overall, however, property owners have done very nicely out of Cruise. As Lynchcombe, the anonymous author of the pamphlet, put it:

"A few bucks were made on the construction works, but the real money was to be made in property. All that extra demand for property, which remained at the same level of supply.

"How our local landowners, estate agents and speculators wallowed in it..."