

June 25, 1979

WHO WE ARE
AND
WHY WE ARE HERE

We would like you to know who we are and why we are here. We are an unaffiliated group of local people who have come together for the purpose of rediscovering our common spiritual roots, in the hope that they will lead us to find direct and creative ways of responding to some of our worst national problems. We call ourselves. AILANTHUS: A Nonviolent Witness for Peace.

We are at Draper Laboratory now because we are deeply alarmed and disturbed by the missile guidance research and development work you are doing here. We are convinced that, because of the logic of the arms race, your very great skill in designing guidance systems for more and more sophisticated weapons (such as the Trident, Cruise and MX missiles) is exactly what is moving us unavoidably toward nuclear annihilation of the planet. This is because as both we and the Russians approach a first-strike capability, both sides will feel compelled to strike first out of fear that the other will do so. And this is quite aside from the very real possibility of a war begun by human error or by an unbalanced national leader. Unless the design and production of new weapons stops, mutual and total destruction does in fact seem assured.

We are also here to protest the priorities represented by your missile guidance work - 80% of the total. This distortion in values can be seen symbolically in the contrast between Draper's munificence and the unmet needs of the surrounding community. (We recognize that Draper also works in the creative, life-sustaining fields of public transportation and medical instrumentation. Our vision is of a Draper whose entire program is devoted to such urgent human needs.)

Who can we look to for help in reversing the present situation? Not the government, since names and reputations and whole bureaucratic empires are at stake. Not the arms industry, which is reaping unprecedented profits in a labor unintensive enterprise. Not the political parties, which for the most part seem either unaware of the realities or too timid to act. Only individual persons who care enough to learn something about the hazards of radiation, and about the mega-economics and mega-paranoia that fuel the arms race can hope to arrest the approaching mega-death -- Persons, that is, who care deeply about life.

But surely that includes the people at Draper! Your jobs are important to you, of course, but we believe that the American scientific community has a unique obligation to assess the morality of its work and to assist the public in understanding the dangers we face.

We are confident that you will recognize the urgency and sincerity of our witness, and that you will want to dialogue with us freely as concerned humans about the human, economic and technical problems that threaten us all. One of these problems is how to free military workers and researchers from their dependence on the arms race. At present, these people are virtual hostages to the pentagon.

We plan to continue our nonviolent vigils and direct action at Draper regularly.

We hope you will stop and rap with us as often as you can.