

Draper Protestor Jailed

On December 10, 1985, Jo Lynn Connelly, a member of Ailanthus: a nonviolent witness for peace, was sentenced to 30 days in the Massachusetts Correctional Institute at Framingham after being found guilty of trespass at Draper Laboratory in Cambridge. Draper carries out research on guidance systems for first-strike nuclear weapons. Ms. Connelly was tried by a six-person jury and sentenced by Judge Murphy in East Cambridge District Court. The small courtroom in which the trial was held could accomodate about fifteen of the fifty supporters who came.

In her testimony, Ms. Connelly described some of her background as a social worker. After getting a Master's degree, she worked with teenagers and said she was disturbed by the despair they expressed in the face of the nuclear threat. Ms. Connelly began to work with the homeless and poor, and took up residence at Haley House, a Catholic Worker house in the South End of Boston which provides meals for homeless men and elderly men and women. Ms. Connelly said she saw a connection between the scarcity of basic resources for those in need and the billions wasted on nuclear weapons.

Ms. Connelly did not contest the facts of the incident, admitting that she had selected August 13, 1985, the anniversary of the Manhattan Project's inception in 1942, and the first atomic bomb explosion three years later, to engage in a "witness", or an act of civil disobedience at Draper. She testified that she had entered the lobby of the facility dressed in black to symbolize mourning, and knelt in prayer, holding an enlarged photograph of a burned Nagasaki mother and child, taken hours after the 1945 bombing. The leaflet she had with her at that time was allowed as evidence, which pointed out the connection between research and the type of destruction delivered to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Members of the Ailanthus group distributed this flyer to passersby and Draper employees during Ms. Connelly's action.

For the past six and a half years, the Ailanthus group has stood in silent vigil in the entrance of Draper Laboratory, and members have regularly engaged in acts of civil disobedience similar to Ms. Connelly's. Several have served prison terms of various lengths. Ms. Connelly also served ten days of a thirty-day sentence (with twenty suspended) at the Framingham Correctional Institute last March for a similar protest, along with six others of the Ailanthus group.

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