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AILANTHUS AT DRAPER: Who Are We and What Do We Mean?

As you may know, Ailanthus has been carrying on a nonviolent peace vigil at Draper Laboratory for nearly six years. During that time, though there have been many arrests, there have been no "incidents" involving Ailanthus members and Draper workers. That speaks well for our ability to dialogue with each other as concerned humans about very difficult issues during a very dangerous time.

But since many of you have arrived at Draper since we last explained our presence here, we thought we owed you an updated account of who we are and exactly what we mean by our continuing presence.

The Ailanthus Community

Ailanthus is a nonviolent peace community. We strive for nonviolence in all aspects of our lives, and to witness in love and in truth. We are spiritually grounded in Christian nonviolence and are indebted to Gandhi's model of nonviolent resistance as well as to the witness of other contemporary nonviolent activists.

Ailanthus is open to all who share its sense of calling. At present, the group consists mainly of Quakers and Catholics, with a sprinkling of other faiths. We meet weekly at Haley House, Boston's Catholic Worker House, to study, reflect, and pray together. This leads to actions, which in turn lead to further meditation and study. Ailanthus has no officers or spokespersons and decisions are reached by the consensus method.

The Draper Witness

Ailanthus comes to Draper every Monday morning, not because we believe you set national nuclear policy, but because Draper is a visible focus of violence in a violence-ridden world; because the first-strike weapons you help develop here (Cruise, MX, and Trident II missiles and now "star Wars" technology) have helped set nuclear armageddon on a hairtrigger; because deep inside everyone knows that to threaten to annihilate the planet in the name of national self-interest or security is a crime against humanity and a blasphemy against God. It is the spiritual insanity of the twentieth century.

We come to Draper also because in pounds per person, the world has more explosive power than food, and because while the U.S. is proposing to spend close to $300 billion on armaments, 42,000 children in Third World countries die every day from lack of food.

We come to Draper to witness that there is another, nonviolent way to solve the world's problems; and that peace is indeed possible if we are willing to entrust our security to God's reconciling power, instead of to the weapons that enslave us. Such a trust would free us to seek life-affirming solutions.

We hope you will look inward and reconsider the nature of your work, but we do not come to Draper to point a finger at the Bombmakers. The Bomb is deeply embedded in all our hearts and until we can disarm ourselves inwardly -- all of us -- we know that there will be no peace. For we are all complicit in the arms race: by paying taxes and by our self-aggrandizing life styles that require our nation to exploit have-not nations in order to underwrite our unheard-of affluence. We have made America an empire that needs the Bomb to enforce its dominance in the world.

So we come to Draper in a spirit of humility, reconciliation, and hope. We see ourselves (all of us) as victims of a violent, repressive society -- so that if the witness succeeds, it succeeds in liberating all of us together.

Courtroom & Prison Witness

Periodically -- generally at Christmas, Good Friday, and Hiroshima Day -- Ailanthus members have carried the witness inside the Draper courtyard or buildings.

For these nonviolent actions members have often been arrested, tried, and served time in Framingham MCI (women) and Billerica (men).

We consider the courtroom and prison an extension of our nonviolent witness. Since we go to trial not to "win" the case but to tell the truth, members have always represented themselves in court. We try to resist the adversarial relationship inherent in courtroom procedure, and by treating everyone with the respect due a child of God, try to foreshadow in a small way the possibilities of the realized Kingdom.

In prison, members try to bring a caring, calming presence, an awareness of the special injustices suffered by the poor, and a concern for the basic rights of all prisoners.

We always welcome your responses, critical or otherwise.

Ailanthus: A Nonviolent Witness for Peace 23 Dartmouth St. Boston 02116