



"For St. George's Hill, we can read our planet itself. In the age of Exterminism, we are all Diggers, reclaiming what is ours. They will try to cut us down, but they cannot cut everybody down. And if we do not defy them now, they'll cut us down anyway, whether by intent or accident or error."

-75p-

Which
Side
ARE
YOU
ON?



Peace protest in the Wake
of the LIBYAN BOMBINGS

Which Side Are You On ?

PEACE PROTEST IN THE NAME OF THE LIBYAN PEOPLE

by Barbara Toft

Nottingham

1986

Cover by Jean Tellwright, from a photograph of a U.S. soldier in anti-nuclear outfit, engaged in "normal" NATO exercises, at USAF Lakenheath, on the afternoon before the bombing of Libya by American F1-11s.

For Jean

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON ?

PEACE PROTEST IN THE WAKE OF THE LIBYAN BOMBINGS

by Les Parsons

Nottingham

1986

This small book is about two things - the wave of public protest occurring in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. bombing of Libya, and the Peace Movement. It is a personal account of my involvement in that protest, as a member of the Peace Movement. As such, it is subjective, but I believe that what happened in this country in the wake of the Libyan bombings is what is needed all the time if we are to end such outrages and the threat of nuclear conflict always lurking behind them. The Peace Movement was at the forefront of protest directed correctly at both the American and British governments. It was good to see and experience that. I hope it continues because I believe that the modern Peace Movement must remain true to the spirit that provoked its phenomenal growth. A spirit rejecting all political games of compromise and gradualism, placing no faith or reliance on political leaders and their parties. The road to our future lies in the collective strength of the Peace Movement, demanding directly the end of the politics of terror that have made a slaughterhouse of the twentieth century.

In the wake of the Libyan bombings, in a crisis, the Peace Movement acted that way. This book is written in the hope that we all continue to act for peace, because we are in a crisis every week, and there is no other way.

Les Parsons, Forest Fields Peace Group.

Which Side Are You On ?

It feels like the end of a strangely disorientating week, a frenetic week of protest pushed out onto the streets by anger and fear, but kept going through a passionate, desperate hope. It's a grey, drizzly Sunday morning, and I'm beginning this in a cafe at King's Cross, drinking coffees, looking out through glass at and across to St. Pancras: waiting for a train back home to Nottingham. My body is a network of aches and bruises connected together by tiredness. Sitting here I feel more vulnerable than ever in my life, yet also alert, very alive. Only a week ago we were sitting at home catching each news as rumours flew about and we wondered nervously if and when the United States would attack Libya. The war cries had rung out from Washington in mid-week and the week end had been a kind of limbo.

On Tuesday morning, Lara (my elder daughter) had woken me at five past six:
"Dad, Reagan's bombed Libya. I think it said they'd got Gadaffi's family. They sent the bombers from England."

I broke away from sleep slowly, trying to be chatty and cheerful for the sake of the children. How many people did likewise on that Tuesday morning ? Later that day I heard of a friend who had gone quietly into his bathroom to cry, for fear of upsetting the kids. As I made breakfast in a daze, fragmented images formed, from a weekend several years ago, when Lara and myself stayed a few days at a peace camp, just hanging on outside the perimeter fences at U.S.A.F. Lakenheath. I remember slipping out of the tent early one morning and, through hazy light, seeing the F1-11s in the distance, still and dark and awesome, with no sound to be heard but the sound of birds.

From there, while we slept, from Mildenhall and from Upper Heyford, they had taken off to bomb unprepared cities. On Monday, at these bases, they had been preparing for the strike, visibly, and yet had not dared to even tell the truth about that - it was, we were told, all part of a normal NATO exercise. Perhaps, though not in the way they meant, it was.

Jean (my wife) spoke hardly a word before she went out to work. On the bits of morning news I heard, what struck me most were reports describing the unpreparedness of Tripoli for the attack - the lights had been on across the city when the bombers struck and a blackout had not occurred until one hour afterwards. In the middle of the morning Jean returned from work, came into the kitchen and cried. Last year, peace protest had hurt me and tired me out. I became almost burnt out from hearing what I was saying, reading what I was writing, grotesque realities making absurd mockeries of everyday living. Now I did not cry, but holding and touching Jean felt like touching all that was living and precious; her trembling was everybody's trembling and in a strangely moving way, the touch was refreshing, waking me up like cold water from a running stream.

Soon after, I walked with Paddy up the hill through gloomy, driving rain, to the CND office. He'd taken the day off work, simply, I think, because he felt that he had to. As with everybody I worked with that day and the rest of the week, the contact felt a bit precious. Familiar faces were already at the office, around a table, planning - Jerry, Jaz, Barbara, Geoff, John, Colin. Again, there was immense comfort gained from seeing that and a chance to become immersed in responding to what had happened. And it seemed to be an immediate and vivid confirmation that, despite the abundance of apathy all around and despite all the reversals and disagreements, the

depressions and despair provoked by mounting nuclear madness, true foundations had been laid; some people at least would refuse to be silent or play the sad game of pretending all would always be well. I am an introverted person, rarely at ease with others, but then, in that office and throughout the week, I never once felt alone, despite trying to absorb the horror of what had been unleashed on Libya and the greater, almost unimaginable horror the bombings had brought so sharply into focus, closer than ever, quite literally, and in the heart and mind. And I never once felt that I was working or amongst strangers, though I worked with some people that I had never met before and others that I hardly knew at all. I think that it is that sense of connectedness that is predominant when I envisage and talk about the 'peace movement', as a tangible entity, a phenomenon evolved and become a living and vital force. It is something difficult to describe with anything approaching pinpoint accuracy, because the nature of this connecting quality takes the movement beyond political grouping as commonly defined and understood. Yet I believe that this raw, elemental sense of connectedness, almost of community, is the peace movement's supreme strength. It may be intuitive, fluid and naive, but ultimately only in the sense that life itself is of the same nature, impossible to nail down to a set of definitions or explanations.

At this raw level, I believe that the peace movement is no more or less than the embodiment of the realisation that any and all political and social agendas are dependant upon a critical change that is, literally, the only road to any future. As E.P. Thompson recognised and stated so clearly several years ago, the nuclear nightmare that we have created has also created, or forced upon us, a new politic. He called that

Exterminism, the transformed politic produced by living with the imminent possibility of species and planet destruction, not as an apocalyptic fantasy, but as an ever present threatened reality, as tangible as rain or grass. It is incredibly difficult to live and to act within this reality. The week of the Libyan bombings brought home to me how much I had run away from living with that reality and, perhaps, how many others within the peace movement had done likewise. Yet, it also brought home to me that the peace movement has to be always focused there. It's the only way forward, whether we see it or not.

Within an hour, plans had been made, tasks shared out and we were going off in different directions to get them off the ground. From that point on, most contact and meetings were connected to these events and actions, or focused on extra bits of detailed planning of them, until it felt as if the week itself was one extended peaceful direct action.

With Jaz, I went off to design and write and print a leaflet and coach tickets for a national demonstration already called for the next Saturday in London. I worked on the leaflet with a person involved in the Central American Solidarity Campaign, whom I'd never met before. By the time we had drafted out the wording, Jaz had tickets ready, printed and numbered. We were able to hand out 2,000 of the leaflets in the city centre, six hours after it had been agreed to produce it. Seven local radical organisations and parties were listed on the back of it as co-sponsors. In addition to the evening demonstration where it was handed out, the leaflet detailed three more events occurring in the next four days in response to the Libyan bombings. Of course, it was just a leaflet, rushed and imperfect, but it showed to me what was possible, what solidarity could mean if we all attended fully to what was happening and concentrated on priorities.

Already I could see that the Libyan crisis had provoked this kind of concentrated, unifying activity, but were things really so different before the bombings and would they radically alter if and when the particular crisis passed?

I managed to get home briefly between finishing the leaflet and the rally, to see Jean and explain what was happening. She had gathered herself together since the morning, but was still nervous and on edge, in a daze. I suppose then and throughout the week we were splitting up the two feelings dominant within us both - the deep, deep fear always there, raised again now to a new and sickening pitch, as well as the burning desire, half passion, half desperation, to act for peace and in peace. During the week we saw each other much less than usual and yet I could not have felt closer, felt more acutely that where I was so was Jean and that, likewise, I was there at home with her, in fear, with tears, hardly able to look at our children - our precious children, but somehow all children at the same time.

Back in the CND office, several of us made placards for the approaching rally. Looking down across the city square at five o'clock, we could see people gathering and it was clear that several hundred people were going to turn up, despite the short notice and difficulty in communicating information. By the crude calculating methods developed ad hoc over the years, it was going to be a good response, a strong one. Then someone said as we looked down that, yes, it was good, but it was not many out of a quarter of a million and more. The comment was stark but accurate and looking back down again, I noticed not the gathering crowd, but the steady flow of people around and across the square on their way home from work or rushing to catch the shops. The comment was accurate and, on the surface at least, people were behaving quite normally on a day that had begun with deadly

F1-11s taking off from British land, roaring through the dark to drop bombs on helpless, terrified people in undefended, unprepared cities. And this had happened with the approval and connivance of those people's government.

And yet, more strongly than ever before, I did not feel that this was a reason for despair. Because there were people gathering in that square, quickly, in anger and determination. And because the numbers game could never lead anywhere but a cul-de-sac of despair. Those of us gathering in Nottingham and in so many other towns and cities in Britain and across the whole of Europe, knew exactly why we were there, understood the necessity for protest on the streets. In the final count, it was simply that some were able to recognise reality and some were not able or were afraid to and it was only those of us who gathered who had the choice as to whether to feel consumed by despair or strong in our defiance. And besides, as the week went on, all evidence accumulated confirmed that ordinary people in this country condemned the callous bombings and likewise condemned their Prime Minister's role in it. There was and is no point in trying to freeze a moment and calculate our numbers because we know and have always known that we are all engaged in a process that is unfolding and can only end when our world is free of the threat of destruction or when we are all blown into oblivion. What we saw in the week of the Libyan bombings was an accelerating of that process and part of that acceleration was that more eyes were open, more people were forced by events to begin to see what was happening and what threatened and to recognise and own the terrible fear there beneath the desperate efforts to carry on happily, pretending that everything was quite normal and would surely be alright in the end.



City centre march, Nottingham - Tuesday April 15th.

Photo: John Birdsall.

Our rally became a short march around the city centre; strong, noisy, angry and alive, carrying the chant I was to shout again and again during the week until it seemed to have an autonomous existence in my head:

"U.S. BASES OUT OF BRITAIN."

Back in the square, plans and events for the rest of the week were announced and the rally faltered to an end without speeches. Yet people drifted away slowly, as if reluctant to go, as if they felt that the protest had only just begun. I had brief words with many familiar faces and it was good, healing to see each one and make some contact, however brief.

Via a quick drink, I went back home with Jerry and Colin, with further arrangements being made and discussed all the time. By now, after the rushing of the day, I felt almost feverish with energy, aware not so much of particular details of the days ahead, but simply of a sense that protest would and must continue through the week. At home, I read a bedtime story to Scarlett (my younger daughter), nestled in my lap. We picked up more television details of the bombings, of dead civilians and broken buildings. And too of the growing wave of condemnation across the world of both the United States and Britain. Later, just before going back out, I listened to a panel of leading politicians squabbling vigorously over whether or not what the U.S. had done contravened U.N. Article 51. Nothing in the week seemed more futile and absurd than that discussion, nor highlighted more starkly the sheer bankruptcy of the mainstream political structures in this country.

Jerry had gone off to collect some things for the planned night action ahead and Jean, Lara and myself began to make a banner from an old sheet, finishing it in minutes with car paint

spray brought back by Jerry. Like naive children, we marvelled at this almost instant banner whereon, bold in blue and orange, were the words:

"U.S. BASES OUT OF BRITAIN."

Even this naivety seemed to be typical of the kind of preparations for direct and peaceful protest that had been occurring all over the country for years. During this time and now, probably with renewed intensity, groups shaped strong and passionate protest from minimal resources and makeshift materials; no more than this to confront the immensely powerful nuclear state of Britain, growing ever more deeply consumed into a deadly alliance with the most militarily mighty state our world has ever known. In that confrontation, our protest was always going to appear naive and terribly fragile and yet, somehow, the tiny resources always formed into something, which nearly always worked. It was as if the makeshift materials contained an energy, a feeling for life that, no matter how massive the resources, how terrifying the power, could never be present in the death machines and nuclear genocide bases.

Banner, flask, gloves, extra clothes and an old piece of carpet piled in the car, we were off to Beeston, on the edge of the city, to meet up with people from another group - Jaz, Jerry, Jayne, Paddy and myself, to plan with friends some of us hardly knew and, if we could, to carry protest that night into the nearby Chilwell tank depot. Located in a suburb on the edge of Nottingham, Chilwell seemed a long way from the military might of Mildenhall, Lakenheath and Upper Heyford, but the U.S. military were now active at Chilwell and it had become one more part of a massive military presence in this country; a nuclear network of 135 bases, with the active

Cruise missile base at Greenham and the one being prepared now, at speed, at Molesworth the deadly centre of that network. This expanding network truly justified Britain being called U.S. Airstrip 1 and, base by base, the peace movement had worked to expose the size of this presence, its military nature and its dangerous and aggressive significance, so long denied and covered up by lies about defence and deterrence. Now, as they counted the cost in Libya, the military network had been finally exposed, revealed to be nothing to do with defence and deterrence, but all about the power to murder and destroy and, if not dismantled and thrown out, to cause, one day, devastation across our country.

It was perhaps just commonsense to carry protest to the nearest outpost of that military presence, there on the outskirts of our city. Beyond that, it was an emotional necessity, an almost cathartic need, a way of denying hopelessness, of casting off the roles of passive victims trapped and helpless in a grotesque nuclear titanic lunging chaotically towards nuclear icebergs.

We planned the action quickly, spontaneously, in a spirit of sharing, without need to verbalise justifications or elaborate at length on aims and purposes. That had all been learnt before and the reasons had been beamed on screens, transmitted by satellites - our incredible technologies again utilised to convey at speed our undiminished appetite for barbarism. More than ever before I felt moved by the fluent reality of what had become known through the peace movement as Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) - the actualisation of the need to confront a nightmarish total threat, directly and in peace, a willingness to commit civil disobedience

and break laws being used to impose servility and silence. This movement had gained great momentum, despite the controversy that it aroused, within the peace movement as well as outside it. More than any other form of protest, it had already revealed that the intricately knitted and treasured garment of law had become no less than a strait-jacket to contain and ensure hapless submission to a deadly politico-military machine quite prepared and able to play with the really precious laws of life and morality as if they were expendable toys.

The Libyan bombings and the terrible dangers that they intensified vividly illustrated that the true crime was to remain abject, sometimes willing prisoners in this strait-jacket, controlled by madmen; to be the pliant and passive herd, poisoned by lies, deceptions and hypocrisies. Perhaps, in the wake of the Libyan bombings, the British people would begin to understand why the civilian and Ministry of Defence police harassed, intimidated and arrested those involved in such protest with burgeoning brutality sometimes aided by U.S. military personnel. And why the courts throughout the country were prepared to pontificate about respect for law and order as they fined and imprisoned protesters, all the while refusing even to acknowledge, let alone act upon, the glaring truth that Britain's nuclear planning, in alliance with that of the United States, flagrantly contravened international law, dismissed as irrelevant the most basic human efforts to impose civilised values to protect the innocent and was no more or less than a foreign policy centred upon the planning and preparation of nuclear genocide. Perhaps they would see too and be appalled by our politicians' sycophantic pleas for respect for the law, a

law used to crush peaceful dissent and leave humane values huddled outside razor wire fences as F1-11 bombers flew off to bomb cities and murder civilians.

So, on that evening after the bombings, there was a sense of urgency running through our group and no need anymore to examine motives. To those who opposed us, such wholehearted embracing of direct action would act only to confirm our extremism; an extremism fuelled by a foolish and naive morality or subversive malice. Within our group, as within so many others, our actions were obvious, right, natural and civilised responses to the anger and fear created by living in a country transformed into a U.S. militarised zone, armed and prepared for nuclear conflict and now acting as launching pad for State terror and murder.

The release from fear and guilt allowed warmth to flow as well that evening. I thought of the song I had heard and sung so often in city squares, on the streets, outside the gates of nuclear bases (or inside the bases), in detention centres and cells - "Which side are you on ?" Only an imbecile would deny the terrifying complexity of the war-ravaged modern world. Yet there were global dangers stamped upon all that complexity and moments, as now, when a desperate clarity illuminated our plight and made that passionate question a real question, in the end the only question. We chatted and joked as we planned, but we all knew that what had happened, horrific in itself, could be a prelude to a far greater crisis and contained the seed of Superpower confrontation where imagined scenarios froze in the mind even as they formed. Of course, a voice said, it probably would not, but

few could be assured of that and nobody could be certain. And who amongst us or the population at large could fail to recognise that 'it' would begin as the Libyan crisis had, with something dismissed in desperate hope as 'minor'. (In one snatched conversation, during that week, a friend remarked on how watching the television for the latest news had become a bit disorientating, reality meshing with vivid recall of the opening scenes of the nuclear holocaust documentary 'Threads', where a similar crisis flared into nuclear conflict and the mounting danger had been beamed into domestic living rooms in the space between the soap operas).

Plans made, roles allocated, we sat and waited, leaving to drive to the base just before four a.m.; ramshackle, urban peace guerillas, armed with kitchen step-ladders and the banner made from old sheet. On the short drive to Chilwell, we eased nervous tension by constructing absurdly, piece by piece, an explanation for our journey, to be offered if we were stopped by the police. I think we became carpet sellers and fitters doing overtime and specialising in carpeting ceilings.

We were not stopped and within seconds of arriving at the fence we were hauling the old carpet over barbed wire and, with the ladder's help, four of us were soon on the other side. Local evening radio reports had indicated that, in the wake of the Libyan bombings, security was being stepped up at U.S. bases. Simultaneously, this had enhanced our desire to succeed and our fear at being apprehended before we achieved our aim. At Chilwell at least, such fear was

unwarranted and within minutes we had crawled and run to our objective, without seeing any M.O.D. patrols. Details of the base, gleaned from many local incursions, guided us perfectly to the building, an ex-signal box (a railway line, now disused, runs through the base) and, using step-ladders again, we were soon on the roof of the building as intended.

We exchanged quick hugs of delight and then began a cold wet wait until a murky dawn, all the while laying low and still in order to remain undetected and to ensure hopefully, a prominent display for passing traffic and for the media. Lying there, with peeks around constantly disturbed by whispers or whispers heard - "car!" - and freezing, head down, it seemed ridiculous to feel delight. We were here, we supposed, because of the Libyan bombings and, beyond that, because of a terrible nuclear threat. How could such a tiny action be an appropriate response to such a hideous event and the unimaginable threat it carried, as always, in its tail? Of course, it was not an appropriate response. But then, what was an appropriate response, beyond personal tears and trembling and a desperate anger howled out on the streets? And, in far more than the literal sense, we were doing this in a country asleep, though perhaps at last more of it was beginning to stir. We were living in a country that had more or less slept through an unparalleled escalation of military power, with awesome weapons of mass destruction the jewel in this deadly crown. What response could ever be appropriate to the threat posed by weapons that even the warrior Lord Mountbatten had said could have no military purpose? Again, as so many times throughout that frenetic week, it seemed to me that I was, in being at Chilwell and protesting on the

streets, sensing the precious quality and nature of our peace movement - we were just ordinary people, appalled and scared, doing what it was possible to do and however small our protest, it was a living statement of dissent and resistance. It was a refusal to obey and a personal expression of the fact that we live in a disrupted time that, unless changes take place, can never be ordinary or 'normal'. And, at the very least, it was saying to others that we were not asleep, burying the images of bombed buildings to dream perhaps of the Queen or of J.R.'s latest treachery. There can be no sane withdrawal from our precarious position until as a people we wake up, and those of us who were awake had the task of sounding the alarm for the others.

A few patrol cars passed, but we were not discovered until after dawn and as the traffic over the nearby flyover was beginning to build up. The Chilwell M.O.D. police decided to play a waiting game. From earlier protest, we knew each other and although there was never any guarantee of it, their approach to us was reasonable, human and in stunning contrast to policing experienced later in the week.

Just after a grey and wet dawn struggled through, two of our Beeston friends came along to give us support, with their two children, excited by this unusual early morning outing, waving from the flyover. Looking across at them, I could see the other side of our protest that makes it always more than fragile and precarious as it confronts the nuclear state. We had grown up in a society determined to bribe and blind us into passivity and obedience and as that failed was now deliberately intensifying its effort to threaten and bully us back into the fold. All that had happened since the decision to bring Cruise missiles to Britain showed

that the nuclear state was failing to curb or crush dissent and a woman and a man with their children, waving through gloomy drizzle from a low flyover was one tiny but vital sign of that failure. I had never talked to them prior to the previous evening, but in one sense felt close to them now, as close as to my own family. We knew which side we were on and our children knew too. I would never forget that I began to discover the reality of the world I was growing up in by accident, reading a Sunday newspaper headline during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. I remember not being able to comprehend or believe what was there in black and white, but only cry. How could people destroy us all by pressing some buttons? How could they do that? They were a child's questions racing through my head, but I grew up and became a father and I still have never heard an answer that has given me a scrap of comfort. There are no answers that I can give my children. But at least they will always be told the truth and like the two small children on the flyover, at least they were awake.

It was cold and rainy through the morning, but our action was succeeding and a steady stream of media people came and interviewed, filmed, photographed - television, radio, newspapers, questioning, clicking, filming, from the flyover. 'U.S. BASES OUT OF BRITAIN' would become a message beamed out through the Midlands. We had a small radio with us and happily devoured the reports in the morning, running on through the whole day. It was news mixed with the latest reports on the Libyan crisis and this became the pattern for the rest of the week; activity, punctuated by fragments of information, unconnected in my mind to any particular day. At some point, I heard that Gadaffi's adopted child had been killed, the extent of death and injuries, of the destruction of non-military targets,

burgeoning world condemnation, ineptly and hypocritically countered by Thatcher's government, its backing of the U.S. murders sickeningly softened later in the week by softvoiced regrets at civilian death and suffering that was, of course, necessary. Whenever I heard an updated report, I listened most intently for news of the Russian response and I cannot believe that most people did not do likewise. Yet in many ways that seemed to be the strongest illustration of the feeling of utter helplessness that protesting was trying to counter and had to. I had to feel relief at the tempered nature of the Russian response and its lack of hysteria, yet felt both furious and foolish that I was so dependent upon moderation from the other Superpower that had shown, at home and abroad and so many times, a devastating ruthlessness in its pursuit of power and domination and, of course, like the United States, held the whole world nuclear hostage. And when I learned that Russia had been informed of the bombings in advance, it gave fresh confirmation that these immensely powerful states were quite prepared to carve up the planet between them and to demand perpetual obedience through the hideous threat of blowing it all up if they failed or were thwarted.

One day, buried in the world news, I heard that the peace chapel at Molesworth USAF had been bulldozed to the ground. It was a tiny event, but the small, half-built chapel had survived the show of force which evicted the peace camps from Molesworth when a speedy and expensive erecting of steel mesh fence and razor-wire had heralded the beginning of the drive to turn a disused airfield into the second U.S. Cruise missile genocide base. The peace chapel had, I think, become a prec-

ious symbol of a human alternative to human madness; not just for the Christian protesters amongst us, but also those with the courage and love of others in them that allowed a true interpretation of the words of Christ. Its fragility in the wasteland of razor-wire and guards, where mass crime was being prepared, was our fragility. It was a sad and telling irony that this roofless chapel should be destroyed in a week that had given a modest glimpse of the power and intentions of the U.S. military takeover of Britain and a chilling reminder of what it could all lead to. I remembered the first time I had seen, on a chilly and damp, dark evening, in the December before the Rainbow Village eviction, the chapel and people gathered there, singing and praying for peace.

Jayne and Jaz came down from the roof in the morning, to the relief of the M.O.D. police. The early morning rush of traffic had brought much response to our action from passing drivers. The great majority of responses were warm and positive, but I was also struck by the intense anger and hostility expressed by those who disapproved. It was often a crude and aggressive anger, making more impact in accumulation during the day than when I heard it on the streets. It was simultaneously encouraging and disturbing and it was not the opposition itself, but the anger behind it that was most striking. It was as though events were, increasingly, exposing and probing already raw nerves, as though deeply engrained beliefs had to be clung to now in ferocious desperation because beyond them was a terrifying vacuum. "Fuck off back to Russia" was the message. How could it be anything else? Russia had to be the only ogre, the beast, the inhuman other, the enemy. It had to be, because if it was not really like that, nothing would

make sense any more. The growing activity and influence of the peace movement had put across so much information and evidence to the contrary, making it harder all the time to cast it aside or to deny it as red subversion. The strain of the effort to do so generated increasing aggression as people held on to what made them feel secure, desperately precisely because of the insecurity lurking behind all that. It was like the fury of Othello, unable to bear even the thought of his wife being unfaithful because, deeply insecure, his whole sense of meaning was dependent upon her faithfulness. If it was not there, chaos truly had come again. The telling of truth and the exposure of lies had been gnawing away at people's falsely based security for years, but now we had the Libyan bombings and they were not dark prophecy or propaganda, but had actually happened and had come from bases in Britain. And this terrible ogre, the Russian threat, was nowhere to be seen or heard. Somehow it made sense that the desperate and false security, more tangibly exposed than ever before, would cause the anger and aggression to likewise intensify and reach a new pitch.

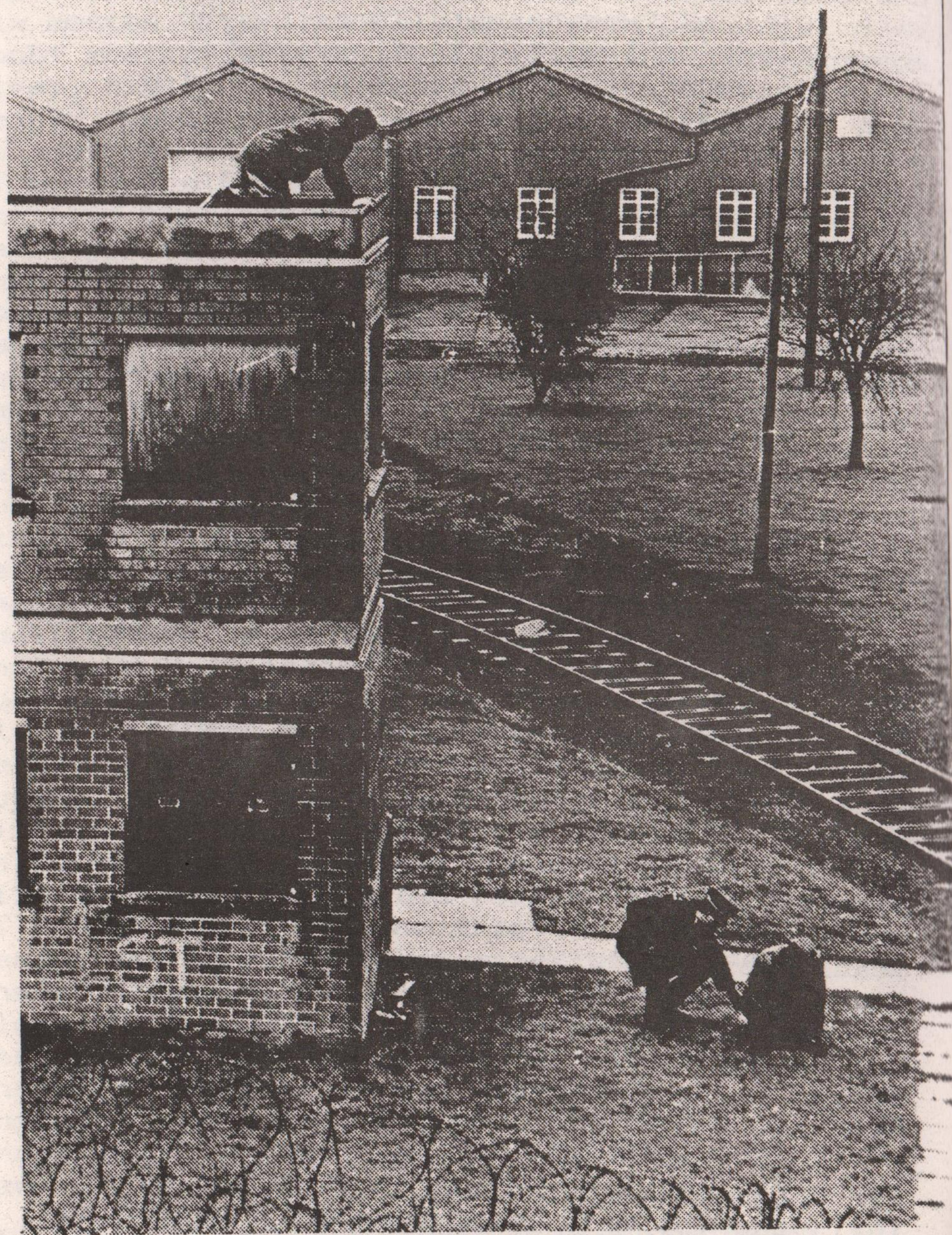
The predominance of support and approval from passing drivers on a small flyover in Chilwell was a crude measure of public feeling; but opinion polls conducted in the aftermath of the bombings gave conclusive proof that the great majority of people in this country opposed the bombings and condemned Britain's key role in them. Of course, that was immediate response, no doubt in part created by fear of terrorist retaliation, but not all the opposition and the sheer anger would melt away. The size and intensity of it signalled, surely, a change of immense signif-

icance - would 70% of British people have condemned the bombing of Libya from British bases if Reagan had launched his bombers six months after the Falklands war? No doubt most people would slip back into their lives, but it was unlikely that all those people would ever again dismiss opposition to American bases in Britain as proof only of misplaced idealism or of subversive, unpatriotic tendencies. Sheer horror at what had happened brought the peace movement out onto the streets in passionate protest. That would have happened anyway, but perhaps so many of us stayed longer or came out again and again because, as the week went on, it was dawning on us that perhaps we would not remain in the minority. Perhaps too many of us had come to believe and accept that state, not feeling change as an authentic possibility. In the wake of the Libyan bombings, we were carrying out our protest on behalf of the British people, not in the face of their indifference or apathy, but expressing fear and anger felt across the nation. Thatcher had prided herself on being the politician with her finger on the nation's emotional pulse - that was the root of her populist appeal. But she had got it badly wrong this time and she knew and Geoffrey Howe knew it as he offered empty legalisms in justification of murder. Libya had exposed the extent of our government's commitment to President Reagan and American foreign policies. They shared a rhetoric that pumped the patriotic blood through veins, but Rambo politics were not, in the end, a form of stirring rhetoric: they led to the bombing of children. Now people had seen that and, thank God, they were appalled by what they saw.

As the latest on the Libyan crisis dominated all news, we were on a roof at U.S. Chilwell, trying to keep warm and periodically getting

drenched. Weather and mood seemed to fluctuate in unison. In such actions as this, there is almost a need to deflect tension and absorption in the reasons for protest with lightness and humour. There can be moments when a zany twist of perspective occurs spontaneously in the mind, causing self to suddenly look at self, almost as a stranger, and wonder. There we were, on a little, ex-signal box roof in the rain. How on earth had a life wound its way to this particular time and location? I nearly always experience this sensation at some point in a prolonged protest - a 'so what?' gnawing away deep down, a feeling of hopelessness that wants to dismiss as an absurd and futile gesture what was happening, as no more than token dissent. It is sometimes difficult to climb out of this feeling, perhaps in the end it is almost a matter of faith because really it is a striving to overcome the echo inside each one of us, an echo of the most hopeless and helpless phrase in the whole nuclear debate: "There is nothing we can do". If that belief wins, then becomes a past tense, it will serve as our universal epitaph. There have been times when I have succumbed to that and perhaps the week of the Libyan bombings should have achieved that kind of collapse of hope, even within a peace movement that had striven so passionately for years, only to learn that the F1-11s flew off with ease to do their deadly work. As I write this, I realise that the collapse of hope did not happen - the writing itself is proof of that. It did not happen for me or so many others I saw during the week. We can do everything; we have to.

For a few minutes, midway through the morning, the Chilwell roof occupation seemed to collapse about us when, in an unfortunate accident, Jerry fell off the roof. It was a



Roof protest, seconds after Jerry's fall,
Chilwell - Wednesday April 16th.

Photo: Derby Evening Telegraph.

twenty foot drop, but, incredibly, he escaped with only minor bruising. That was quickly apparent, but in the minute or so beforehand I dreaded far far worse consequences. A shaky feeling of vulnerability remained long after Jerry had got up and been led away by M.O.D. police. My obvious sense of concern seemed to be heightened by where we were and why we were there; by the closeness and mutual dependency that blossoms so quickly and powerfully between those involved in direct action protest. I think that is very difficult to be engaged in such protests for long without the ego-world breaking down at least a fraction, without experiencing a thinning of the barrier between self and others. This seems to be something that goes way beyond the sharing of political objectives. In a comic apocalyptic song recounting a nightmare dream experiencing of World War III, Dylan ended with the lines - "You can be in my dream, if I can be in yours". He, of course, being the only survivor of the holocaust. Over the past five years, in Norwich and Nottingham, I have often witnessed within the peace movement, the realisation of that potential for acting out of what unites, what is shared, rather than what divides or pulls apart. Perhaps that experience amounts to only a dream reality, but maybe that has to be so for surely we are living in a nightmare reality. And it is truly a waking nightmare for, when we have the courage to open our eyes, we can see no hiding place and would discover none if our eyes had the power to circle the earth.

The M.O.D. police were humanely concerned when Jerry fell and decent enough to return later to tell me that he had been examined by a doctor and, bruising apart, he was alright. That was chosen consideration, occurring as local radio stations were carrying reports not just of our protest but of how its ease of execution had exposed security at the base. The M.O.D.

police at Chilwell are there to protect one small piece of a vast and deadly threat. While they do that, we cannot but be opposed, in a state of confrontation. But the M.O.D. police at Chilwell, or anywhere else, are human beings and that reality extends beyond any role they care to play. There have been countless times during the extended wave of peaceful protest, where they have denied their own humanity in reifying crudely those who refuse to submit in silence and be resigned to nuclear terror. We can never afford to reciprocate, for our own sakes as much as for theirs. I have been in many situations where friends have been abused and ill-treated, where policing has been violent, crude and dehumanising. I have never been in a situation where something else has failed to glimmer through, something human, even if the moment has been brief or contained; there despite, rather than because of, what was happening.

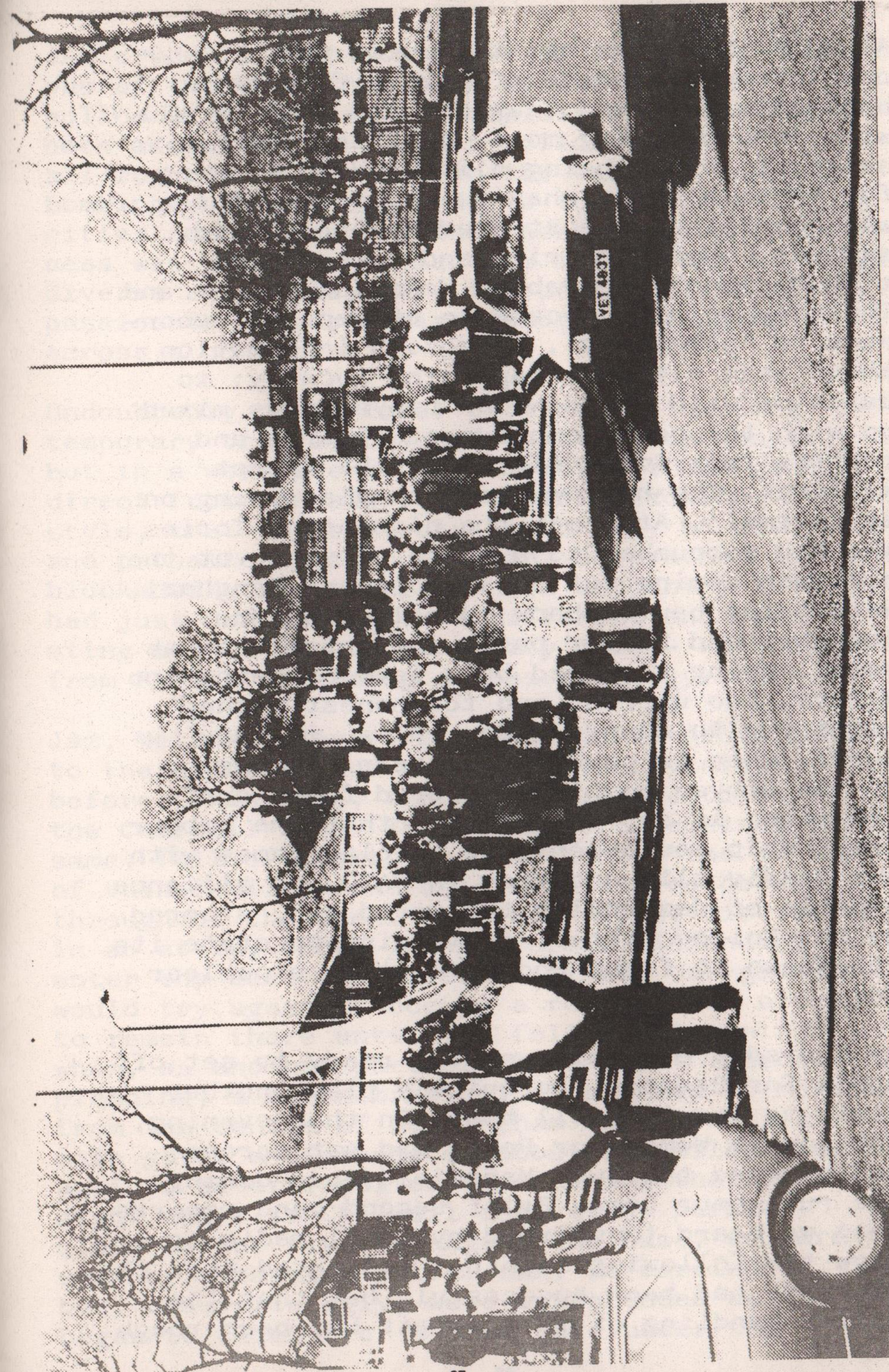
We live in the last phase of a century of horror that has witnessed man-made death and degradation on such a scale as to make true comprehension of the suffering impossible, reduced to absurd statistics. In the end, such horrors have surely only been possible because of the human capacity to deny or refuse to see the human beingness in others. A peace movement song urges us all to break the nuclear chain and every peaceful protest at every nuclear base contributes to the breaking. But we must do more than that - we must break the chain of violence rooted in deadly reification that has constructed a global slaughterhouse out of the Twentieth Century. James Baldwin described that need in an essay written in the 60s, recounting a particularly ugly personal experience of segregation in Alabama. In

it he recalls vividly his sense of utter humiliation and of a burning anger, but concludes that, though we need always to guard ourselves against the mess that people may have become, we must never, never forget the miracle that they are. It is hard, perhaps, in our disordered and violent world to do either well. I believe that it is vital that we do both and I felt that belief more strongly than ever in the week of the Libyan bombings.

I remained the rest of the day on the roof on my own, keeping warm, responding to responses, absorbing the support of friends on the flyover. In between two heavy showers, I read a few pages of a Samuel Beckett novel, remembering that, a few days before, I had been reading tributes in honour of his eightieth birthday. One had been written by John Calder, his publisher, who suggested that Beckett was much misunderstood, was neither pessimist nor optimist, but rather was a "realist who has looked hard at the history of mankind and seen our sad past for what it is, a long catalogue of disasters; wars, massacres, genocide, holocausts, man inflicting incredible cruelties on others because of some difference in colour, race, creed or tribe, his cruelty matched only by his stupidity." That seemed almost painfully accurate, but so did Calder's sense of the message emerging from Beckett's writing, "that it is in his courage to face reality that man achieves dignity and in his kindness to others can find a kind of nobility." Beckett was a comfort on the Chilwell roof and was to be much more so in London later in the week.

I came down from the roof after about 13 hours. The police confirmed that I could be summonsed for obstructing them in the course of their duty, but treated me reasonably enough and released me quickly. Driven back home by Paddy,

alongside a bruised, but buzzing Jerry, we managed to catch local evening television coverage of our protest. Paddy left then, but rushed back ten minutes later, full of news of another successful local protest, directed against Cruise missiles; a continuation of our local response each time a Cruise missile convoy left Greenham Common. The numbers involved had been larger than ever and congregated, as planned, at a busy Nottingham traffic roundabout during the rush hour home. A traffic jam ensued as many drivers slowed down to signal support for the demonstration. It was another sign of how, paradoxically, dire events in Libya had revived peace movement protest. It was also, perhaps, another sign of fear revived, become immediate. No doubt the Ministry of Defence would insist that the Cruise exercise was a normal one, as both the American and British governments had insisted on the day before the bombing of Libya that intensified activity at American bases in this country was no more than a prelude to a normal NATO exercise. But who would believe that now, or fail to understand that the military machine knew only too well the dangers of escalating levels of conflict generated by the attack on Libya and were preparing accordingly? The timing of this particular cruise exercise, this purportedly 'normal' dispersal of a genocide-capable convoy out of Greenham Common, highlighted the link between the present crisis and the ever present threat of nuclear conflict more starkly than any protest by the peace movement.



Cruise-Out Demonstration, Nottingham - Wednesday April 16th.
Photo: John Birdsall.

At home that evening, tiredness was countered by a sense of warmth from being back with Lara and Scarlett and most of all with Jean. Nothing more, or less, than a sense of joy at being alive and in knowing for certain that, whatever happened, there was something unpenetrated by the nuclear madness, something rich and vulnerable, rich because vulnerable. Wednesday night and Thursday morning became an attempt to reconnect to 'normality', to absorb information about what else was happening locally; to catch up with the news on Libya, news mixed up with the new unemployment figures and reports from South Africa of the latest killings. The horror show was also going on as 'normal'. At home, the dissenting Tories who had succumbed to a sense of shame at the pictures coming out of Tripoli and Benghazi, were being hauled back into line by Mrs. Thatcher and Labour party criticism was, as usual, being tempered by a fear of being too direct, too upfront and too honest - they might try to change a few rules, if they dared, when in power, but their response to the Libyan bombings offered fresh confirmation, if any was needed, that the Labour leadership would continue to play games with our deadly ally and stay in NATO, an alliance capable of destroying the world and, steered by the United States, continuing to state its readiness to fight and even start a nuclear war.

By Thursday evening, we were ready to set off again for Beeston, to quickly plan another visit to the Chilwell base. On that evening, Nottingham Women For Peace had sat across and blocked the busy Mansfield Road during the rush-hour home. Brief second hand reports that we heard (confirmed by local media coverage the following morning) indicated that the blockade had been successful, but that the police handling of the protest had been rough

and crude. I found out several days later that one of the women had been arrested by the police after trying to complain that she had been assaulted by another policeman. As with all reports of protest in the wake of the U.S. bombings, from local ones to those occurring in cities across Europe, that sense of connectedness was stirred; it felt as though all of these diverse activities were the parts of one vivid, passionate and determined protest, ranging across a continent.

Undoubtedly, this local protest, in causing temporary traffic chaos, provoked some anger, but in a week where U.S. Airstrip 1 had gone direct from 'on alert' to bombing action, U.S. style, that anger surely could only be absorbed and propelled back out again. Blockaders and blockaded were living both in a country that had just colluded with a different and devastating method of stopping city life - with bombs from F1-11s screaming across dark sky above.

Jaz, Melissa, Jerry, Liz and myself drove back to the house we had met up in two evenings before. This time, ten of us planned to enter the Chilwell base. The atmosphere remained the same, full of warmth and certainty, the mixture of vulnerability and determination so pervasive throughout the week. From meandering discussion in an attic, three groups formed, intending to enter the base at different times. Our group would try again to occupy a roof, in an attempt to remain there until the following evening when, as another part of the instant Tuesday planning, a demonstration was planned to march from the centre of Nottingham to Chilwell's main gate, a distance of about six miles. We noticed several police cars during the late night drive to Chilwell and, as we parked close to the flyover edging the base, we were seen by a passing patrol car. We carried on, but, unsurprisingly, were apprehended as we began to climb over a base gate under the

flyover and, within a couple of minutes, had been joined outside the base by eight civilian police men and women and three patrol cars. The Sergeant in charge made half an effort to impose his authority over us in a way designed to intimidate, but overall they seemed bemused and uncertain as to how they should respond to us. We had done nothing that they could arrest us for and, after a few cold minutes, left with a stern warning to go home and not come back again. We drove off, disappointed, but determined to get in some other way. We 'phoned the other groups to let them know what had happened and then drove off to the other side of the base and eventually managed to get into the base through wooded land. Inside, we made our way in fits and starts, like half efficient peace commandos, through a straggled maze of buildings and sheds. John had never been arrested before and, huddled in hiding behind a wall, we talked briefly of arrest, the various procedures and possibilities and what you did and did not have to say. Three quarters of the way across the base, towards 'our' roof, we were spotted and very quickly rounded up. The few hours then spent in custody were not particularly unpleasant. Again Jerry and myself knew many of the M.O.D. police from previous actions and their approach now was low-key and relaxed. Several said that they felt Reagan had been crazy to bomb Libya and our government wrong to allow U.S. bases in this country to be used for the attack. One of them summed it up: "Maggie's made a big mistake this time." He had been in the army for twenty two years and spent seven of those in Northern Ireland. He talked of a colleague who had had his arms blown off by a booby trap bomb in a house in Belfast and who had collapsed and died later whilst convalescing, complete with artificial arms. He said the man had been about twenty six or twenty seven years old.

In a way, these were just conversations to pass the time, yet, even so, if men deeply entrenched in the system and quite literally defending it, could see no sense in what had happened, was it surprising that public condemnation was so widespread and strong? But then, how much did the British government care about that anymore? How much did the Reagan administration care that their attack had been condemned across the world?

We were released before dawn and discovered that another group had managed to convey the 'U.S. BASES OUT OF BRITAIN' message directly onto Chilwell base and that the third group had been arrested by civilian police outside the base, on suspicion of going equipped to commit criminal damage. They had felt tip pens with them! They were released without charge after several hours and we were all back together again as dawn broke.

Again our actions made local news that morning and served to bring home locally the reality of the U.S. military presence on the outskirts of Nottingham. Yet the almost casual ending to the action felt unreal as we drove home. We seemed jaded and tired and by now I felt almost disconnected from the patterns and chores of my life; jarred, experiencing again something of what I had felt in the last, prolonged burst of fervent peace activity - the sheer strain of trying to hold together two different worlds, of trying to keep domestic life going at the same time as trying to act as vigorously and as passionately as possible. It was not really a consequence of tiredness, much more an expanding sensation of absurdity, colouring all the days; the immersion in the reality of the nuclear threat turning each necessary parochial task into something futile, pointless, meaningless, expanding remorselessly until it seemed

to make a mockery of parenthood itself. Hearing only "the chafe and jar of nuclear war", Robert Lowell, newly a father, in his poem 'Fall, 1961', had offered the awful observation, "A father's no shield for his child." The line had lodged in my mind when I read it. Now it seemed to have become stuck fast in my heart. Staring directly at the nuclear threat was blinding, provoked a sense of total claustrophobia, as though one was living in a bunker, receiving persistent reports of slaughter and starvation and always waiting for something even worse.

On Friday, hopes were pinned to the march scheduled for the early evening, from the city centre to the Chilwell base. It needed to provide a climax to the week of protest locally, before the national demonstration in London the following day. It was intended that a short rally would end the demonstration at Chilwell and, in between catching up with the housework in a sleepy daze, I felt an urge growing to speak at the rally, to try to focus on the key issues of the bombings and to try to release some of the fear and anger, really a sense of outrage that had been in me all week and that I was certain must be similarly there in so many other people.

I felt anger too and worry at the political direction I feared many people involved in the peace movement were turning to. Of course, in the broadest sense, the peace movement could not be anything other than political - how could it be otherwise when the core of the movement was the total opposition to an imminent and man-made threat to all people, the whole social fabric? It was a growing immersion in a much narrower form of politics that worried me. It worried me because the modern peace movement

had grown so quickly and dramatically, not just because an acute awareness of the threat we all faced and its terrible immediacy had been triggered in so many people by the decision to base Cruise missiles in Britain, but also because of the phenomenal spreading of a passionate and intuitive recognition that the politicians, all politicians, had failed miserably and unforgivably not only to reverse but even to slow down and halt the insane nuclear arms race. In other words, it seemed to me that the emergence of the peace movement as an influential and potent demand for radical change was intrinsically connected to the realisation that the old and established political structures were bankrupt in the face of the most urgent and imperative challenge facing us all. It was the force of that movement that had been felt across Europe in the eighties.

In Britain, the intensity and energy of the peace movement had been felt by all the mainstream political parties and had influenced the Labour Party, in particular, to take up a defence policy committed, in opposition at least, to unilateral nuclear disarmament. As the lead-up to the next general election began, there was a major party who would, if elected, remove Cruise missiles, cancel the Trident programme and get rid of U.S. nuclear bases. And yet, already, the policies were becoming cloudy around the edges - how many U.S. bases would go? How many would remain? When would Polaris go? Would Britain remain in NATO? If so, in what capacity, as a country rejecting nuclear weapons, but supporting and bolstering an alliance based on maintaining the nuclear threat? And anyone who cared to examine post-1945 British history knew the Labour Party's appalling record on nuclear weapons, whilst in office. There was every reason not to place trust in the hope that such a record could and would be reversed. Even more importantly, the impetus to change, to bring sanity to the

nuclear nightmare, had been generated by the peace movement and not by any political party. Above all, we could not risk a channelling of that energy into, say, a concerted effort to get a Labour Government elected, in the belief that this was the solution. In a country ravaged by Thatcherism, such an impulse was understandable, but the danger lay in placing hope and faith again in the very same political structures whose utter dereliction in the face of the nuclear threat had created the conditions leading to the phenomenal growth of the movement in the first place. In essence, this was a peoples' movement, not asking the politicians to lead, but demanding that they follow. The peace movement was the broadest church of all, but its strength and its energy was the strength of ordinary people, refusing to allow anymore politicians to decide if and when they lived or died. Only that strength and energy will give us a future and I believe it will dissipate fatally if we allow it to be diverted or channelled into the political fabric that has, for all its promises of peace, led us to the very brink of nuclear extinction.

What happened in a week, as so many involved in the peace movement came onto the streets in outraged protest, confirmed and clarified my own fears, but also revived the recognition of the force that could move us beyond our crisis. It was still protest and survive, a necessary refusal to rely on the 'normal channels', but to retain and nurture faith instead in the strength and importance of every individual.

In the late afternoon, we caught a bus into the city, where the demonstration would gather. Jean, Scarlett, Lara, her friend Becky from school and myself. We had seen little of each other during the week and it was good to be together now, as a family. A good crowd had

already gathered by the time we arrived and over 400 people were involved at one point or another and at least that number walked the six miles to Chilwell. It was a large number for all of us involved, there at short notice, committed to being exposed to the public eye, to overcoming our cramping and sometimes debilitating social reticence; almost a shyness. And it was a march that carried with it, and far more directly than any I had been involved in for a long time, a conviction that it had to be there and had a right to be there. A right because the bombing of Libya had given a scaring glimpse of the violence raging beyond our cities. A right because Libya had brought home again the awful truth, that almost incomprehensible devastation could at any time howl in like a hurricane. And this time, a right because we knew our anger was not ours alone - it was an anger experienced by many who could not march but yet had seen, perhaps for the first time, where our government, hand in hand with President Reagan, could lead us to.

I enjoyed the march immensely. It was full of life and vitality, noise and passion, spilling out on the roads and not sneaking or contained on the pavements. It felt cathartic, a way of releasing pent-up hurt and anger that seemed to be beating inside. I believe that the peace movement must act in peace, always. It must not just carry an alternative message, but somehow embody that alternative. Yet part of what we must carry with us, in us, is the understanding that peace is not a passive and fragile state - it is a living spirit, an energy confronting the heart of darkness, a love of life that burns with anger at the stunning crimes already committed, at all those who dare to play stone-hearted God and make every one of our children a generation of victims in

waiting. That rage must never be contained - it's all that stops us letting go and becoming passive victims.

We were marching that Friday against a British government that had willingly colluded with state terrorism and revealed again its appetite for destruction, its capacity for crude hypocrisy. It was a government that had created mass unemployment and now quite openly used it as a weapon to break the people's spirit. It was a government that had invested massively in the armed forces and the police, to create the means to crush the dissent its policies were bound to generate. It was a government that had completed the turning of this country into the modern nuclear state and, in the wake of that, created broken armies of the homeless and the poor, living on the edges of a crumbling welfare state. Now the same government prepared to let our old people freeze to death in unheated homes had shown itself likewise prepared to turn this country into home base for F1-11s, sent off to bomb innocent civilian populations. And it was this government that was led by a woman on record as saying she would be prepared to use nuclear weapons and first if she deemed it necessary. As we walked through Nottingham and I looked at Jean, at our children, at Paddy and Cathy and at their kid Douglas, exchanging pop and mischief with Scarlett across buggies, the anger was as intense and real as the feeling of solidarity with those around me, with me. We chanted all the way to Chilwell and the further we went, the more the marchers prepared to chant. Our banners and placards and chants carried our message, reduced to basics, to basic truth:

"Reagan, Thatcher - terrorists"

"Down with war-mongers - Reagan, Thatcher, Gorbachev"

"U.S. bases out of Britain-Britain out of NATO"

"Reagan, Thatcher - murderers."

The light was failing as we arrived at Chilwell, right up to the police barriers in front of the base's main gate, which was lined with M.O.D. police. We were tired, but how many times now, in Britain and in so many other countries, have people arrived at the barriers to sit or stand there in the name of peace, with police or military on the other side, protecting genocide? Which side are you on? I was three quarters able to overcome my nervousness and spoke my piece. Most of it came out as I had jotted it down earlier in the day. It was raw, in a way a final abandonment of a sophisticated recognition of complexity in favour of the politics of black and white. By speaking it, I knew that I believed it. Believe it.

"We stand here outside an American base at the end of a week that saw the callous bombing, by America, of the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi. That action, the killing of yet more innocent people in the ruthless pursuit of power and domination can never be forgotten or forgiven. More, perhaps, than any of many other actions, it has exposed the nature of the regime controlling America now. And people in Britain have not been fooled by the hypocritical attempts of both the British and American governments to justify the bombings. They dare to call murder of the innocent an act of self defence. And that is why it has been condemned throughout the world, East and West, North and South.

And we know, as the whole world knows, that it is not just America that bears responsibility for this barbaric act. Britain was an active partner; the bombers flew from Britain and, no doubt, they flew with the guidance of British intelligence and surveillance in the Mediterranean. Reagan desperately needed one ally in Europe and he

found that ally in Thatcher, as he and we knew he would. And that was done in our name.

Let there be no doubt about the Libyan bombings. In truth, terrorism was at the core - the callous dismissal of the value of life in the pursuit of power and political ends. But this was not the act of small, tightly knit groups opposing powerful states through terror. This was state terrorism. Libya revealed the truth about Thatcher and Reagan, that they are no more than state terrorists, murderers prepared to use the might of the most powerful military state in human history to bomb undefended cities and the people living in them. This attack was launched by the hypocrites who give out fine words about democratic values, who never tire of offering high-minded condemnations of terrorism, yet show utter disregard for human life when they feel threatened or the need to show who is master.

When the F1-11s flew from Upper Heyford, Lakenheath and Mildenhall, they carried not just bombs, but Thatcher's and Reagan's foreign policy. These were the bombers there to defend us. These were the bases there to deter the Russian threat. Shall we tell the people of Tripoli that, to comfort them? Now the woman who gave us Cruise and wants to give us Trident walks hand in hand with Reagan, murderers of the innocent, terrorists with the power to destroy the world.

For that is the other terrible reality of this week and we all know and feel that. We all felt a disgust at the bombings. But who did not experience a fear, that fear we always live with, that rises in our hearts. Reagan and Thatcher's act reminds us all that we are precariously perched on the edge of oblivion. And they remind us that nothing will deter them from pursuing their ruthless

aims. Just as Thatcher was prepared to make and fight a war to disguise her decimation of our society, so Reagan is prepared to bomb cities with her help, to whip up a war fever at home and pave the way for more attacks on those people who try to break free of the United States in Central America and throughout the world.

But we know that Thatcher has gone too far. The reality of her policies, the threat that they create for every citizen of this country is being understood as never before. Public reaction to the Libyan bombings confirmed that, despite the lies spewed out by the gutter press in support of their leader.

People are beginning to see that the 135 U.S. bases in Britain have nothing to do with defence and deterrence. They see that British and American foreign policy leads not to peace and security, but to state terrorism. Only we can force them to see that, if we do not abandon these policies, they will bring us a nuclear holocaust.

The peace movement across Britain, across Europe, has been telling these truths for a long time now. Yet, as we put fresh energy into putting across our basic case to the people, we must tell these truths more loudly than ever. In a country where more and more people are beginning to see through the lies and hypocrisy.

It is only we, as ordinary people, who can do that. We know that basic case, the case for sanity, for peace and security. We have to do that because we still live in a country where not one of the major political parties is prepared to detach this country from the insane effort of the United States to use its unparalleled military and economic

power to control and dominate the world.

We know the case well, that we must get rid of all nuclear weapons in Britain. That we must throw out every American base in Britain. And we must get out of NATO now. Out of an aggressive nuclear alliance; the primary means that America uses to front its efforts to bully nations into obedience and submission. The three must not be divisible. To remove nuclear weapons and American bases and yet remain in NATO would be an act as morally indefensible as it would be dangerous. To those who argue that we should remain in NATO and argue for peace and restraint, let them look at this week when, Thatcher apart, no other NATO nation wanted the attack on Libya. Let them ask the people of Tripoli what effect that influence had on Reagan.

Thatcher and Reagan have the means and the will to destroy us all as coldly as they attacked Libya. We must work as never before to prevent that and get rid of all weapons of mass destruction, of all aggressive foreign bases and to quit an alliance that could initiate a nuclear war. You could call that a basic case. But in reality it is the only road away from Armageddon."

I felt better for the saying of that. I had felt hope through the march, from everybody on it. But I felt sad that two Labour party speakers did not mention NATO. Well, their leaders were probably still studying Article 51. At the end, I felt the need to point out my daughters to some of the M.O.D. police I knew. Later, back at home, Jean told me that Lara had cried when I was speaking. Back in Nottingham, Paddy, Jaz and I talked over the march and the week, in the pub. It was as though elation, doubt, tension and tiredness

were all mixed up together. More, perhaps, than ever before, we had been active throughout the week to stave off despair, a numbing sense of hopelessness. I chatted on late with Paddy. He was, is, a person I draw great strength from, someone I trust absolutely, who ultimately always carries deep down in him the belief that it is right to oppose all nuclear weapons and nuclear plans. Someone who will protest and will not stop protesting, because he believes it is the only way to survive, the only hope of being able to protect those he loves. No promised political agenda defines and contains that belief. It's always the other way around. What I see in Paddy is what I feel is at the vital centre of the peace movement and what is its greatest strength. It's what will allow us to survive, if we do.

We met again early the next morning on one of coaches about to set off for London and the national demonstration called by CND as an immediate response to the U.S. attack on Libya. Five coaches and a minibus went down from Nottingham, a superb number for something occurring at such short notice, in absolute haste. We wondered how many would demonstrate in London and how the protest might develop. Although the protest was called as a peaceful one, there seemed to be a number of factors in play that might change that. It was obvious by now, for example, that there was a great deal of anger and condemnation felt against the American and British governments. CND's demonstration, in the capital, on the first weekend after the bombings, was likely to be a focal point for that anger. An anger that would be expressed by all kinds of groups and organisations, not all of which would place non-violence as the vital centre of protest, some perhaps with very good reasons. Again, the Metropolitan police presence was sure to be a large one, there in the context of an expanding policy of policing by direct

confrontation, methods that had evolved during the miners' strike and were now being deployed at Wapping. These factors pointed to a high risk of conflict. I was to find out that 10,000 people would go to Grosvenor Square and the length of the protest and the diversity of locations would suggest that many more were probably involved at some time during the day. Sadly, our worries about violent confrontation were realised late in the afternoon; one reason for such confrontation was savoured more personally long before the clashes occurred.

There were many faces unfamiliar to me on our coach and it was very noticeable on first sight how diverse the group was. The back of the coach, in particular, was occupied by young, punkily dressed people, anarchist style, while at the front there was a number of elderly people in the most conventional of dress styles. That such diverse groups could come together in this way for the sake of protest seemed to be one more confirmation of the strength and extent of the reaction against the Libyan bombings, another illustration of the peace movement's capacity to unite diversity around a common desire for an end to insanity.

We stopped at Toddington service station, on the way to London, and, in the cafeteria, I overheard a fragment of conversation between two smartly dressed, eminently respectable women, who appeared to be mother and daughter. They were discussing Libya and the mother was determinedly arguing that the bombings, though not a nice thing, had been necessary. But her daughter resisted this argument stubbornly, with equal determination and when this stubborn resistance was again reciprocated, she silenced the argument by asking, in anger, how the mother would have felt if it had been her children. The impasse remained when I left for the coach, but

I wondered how many such discussions and disagreements had occurred during the week. The daughter looked and sounded a perfect copy of the mother. It seemed reasonable to assume that they shared a conventionally conservative view of the world but, and hence the anger between them, the Libyan bombings had provoked division because the daughter could no longer quite buy the hollow rhetoric of justification for terror. Intuitively she was appalled and she seemed to trust her intuition. Perhaps there really was a limit to what people would swallow and regurgitate and Thatcher had moved more of them another step towards that limit.

Coaching into London became for me, as usual, a succession of glimpses of old territory, of bits of North London where I had grown up and lived, more or less, until ten years ago. Coming off the M1, we passed the large estate in Colindale where my parents still lived and where an RAF museum had become a prominent landmark. Then a succession of familiar buildings and roads - Hendon, Brent Cross, Kilburn and West Hampstead. The passing images provoked memories and again a sense of baffled wonder at the longer journey that had taken me from that world to the present point where, like so many others, I felt ashamed and sickened by the society I was in; experiencing myself as on the edge of it, increasingly defined as alien, even subversive. This had not happened consciously, in a determined and political way. It was simply that it seemed to have become no longer possible to assent even passively to policies and to their underlying values that were, at one and the same time, dividing and fragmenting our society - pushing us all ineluctably along a road that terminated in holocaust. To remain obedient and silent now would be no more possible than to shuffle naked along a line ending at a gas chamber, when I knew exactly

what was waiting for me. Now, the greatest danger seemed to be this silent assent, a deep-seated and widespread fear of disobedience, the conditioned conformity that had already been essential as a prerequisite of so many atrocities. The politics of exterminism could only be reversed if that conditioned chain of obedience was broken. My childhood had hammered home the value of obedience. Now I believed that obedience could stop my own children ever growing up. And that the peace movement's greatest task, in all countries, was to break that chain. Not to cause chaos, but to ensure a human future.

Our coach arrived early and, after being dropped on the Park Lane side of Hyde Park, Paddy and myself began walking, heading for Grosvenor Square. We found it quite difficult, in the end, to get there, because the police had cordoned off almost all of the side streets leading to the square and, beyond the barriers, there were many signs of a large police presence gathering in reserve and including lines of tethered, unmounted horses.

In Oxford Street, the usual Saturday morning crowd was thronging by - business as usual. Still, of course, in a ravaged and violent world, in the wealthy centres of major cities, this other side of mindless obedience was on display, homing in on new fashions, new computer gadgetry, oblivious. When, finally, we found a way through to Grosvenor Square, we discovered largish numbers of protesters already gathered, but an over-calm, almost subdued atmosphere. At times, as we walked, it was almost eerily quiet and birds could be heard singing in the green, central square cordoned off by police. Barriers had been erected on both sides of the square, to block any attempt to gather immediately outside the American Embassy. The police

tactics were, very clearly, to contain protesters within these margins, to confine the demonstration precisely within the areas defined as being acceptable to the police. And as all the adjacent side-streets were policed and cordoned off, it meant that the wide space in front of the Embassy lay empty, but for a line of police men and women, on the wide steps leading up to the building. On the roof of the Embassy, the Stars and Stripes was flying freely and the golden eagle glittered.

I felt angry and frustrated at what I saw and felt acutely this sense of containment; that the police were acting to ensure that the Embassy remained protected, untroubled by the voices of protest and outrage. The police, their horses and barriers, were there to protect the U.S. Embassy, its flag and its eagle. The state was symbolically huddled round to protect the symbolic presence, in the square, of a country that, only days before, was responsible for bombing civilians and which had provoked an international crisis in order to retain control in the Mediterranean and to keep its grip on oil in Africa and the Middle East. Days after the latest violence by a state that had changed the world by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a crime still causing death and suffering, that had dropped 'agent orange' in such abundance, on Vietnam, causing similar effects, during a war that had American generals bragging of mass bombing raids at press conferences and casually admitting that yes, some villages had been 'accidentally destroyed.' No doubt, there was always a silky-voiced politician in Washington to voice regret at the deaths, just as Thatcher had regretted the deaths in Libya.

More and more people were coming into Grosvenor Square, but the atmosphere remained cool, passive. Close to the barriers, some people were sitting

in groups, singing songs of peace and reconciliation. This kind of protest was often very rich and moving, but it somehow seemed out of place at this time, when anger and fear had combined to disrupt so many lives, from the moment that news came through of the F1-11s' raid. To have us quietly contained, clinically cordoned off from the Embassy, hidden away from the 'normal' crowds on Oxford Street - this was surely what the government wanted, as it licked the wounds of public condemnation. There had been a very different atmosphere on the march from Nottingham to Chilwell on the previous evening. Tiny in comparison and certainly just as peaceful, it had been a passionate expression of anger at what had happened. It seemed to be governed, correctly, by the understanding that we were not dissenting from reasonable beings with an opposing point of view, but confronting nothing less than murderers. At Grosvenor Square, we were protesting, but it seemed to be on the terms imposed by those who preached the virtues of law and order, yet gave willing aid to murder.

When we joined up with friends from Nottingham, others also expressed frustration at the atmosphere of containment and passivity. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we were in a state of disagreement with those prepared to sit behind the barriers and witness for peace in that way. I do not believe it is or ever was a question of 'us' and 'them'; but people, recognising the imperative need for peace, striving to find the most meaningful way to express that need for themselves and convey it to those who dare to listen. For years that has produced a rich diversity of living statements, sharing peace in common as precious aim and method. And that was the case in London that Saturday. Some of us did not want to be contained and needed to carry our protest

beyond the barriers, right up to the steps of the American Embassy. We were close up against the barriers by now and, shortly before one o'clock, I managed to lift up the end of the sectioned barriers and we tried to move forwards.

The police responded immediately and aggressively. I was knocked to the ground and found myself being dragged backwards, gripped by the neck so tightly that I literally could not draw breath. I could just about see that the police had blocked off the move forward and were re-establishing the barriers. Two continued to drag me away, back past the Embassy, towards the cordoned-off side-streets at the back of it. The police handling had hurt and scared me for, as always, I had offered no physical resistance at all when stopped. It was painful too to catch glimpses of the crowd behind the barriers, my friends, receding, becoming distant. Then I saw that the police were dragging another person back and I recognised Guy, a friend from Nottingham. He was screaming and obviously in great pain as police dragged him with a brutality that was wholly unnecessary, ignoring the screams of pain. Further back, the police stopped for a few seconds and then pulled us up roughly by our arms, jamming them behind us and tightening the grip until the pain was so intense that we were literally forced by the pain to walk forwards. In the side-streets, behind the Embassy, lots more police were gathered and I could see whole lines of police horses, tethered, likewise in waiting. Bent over by the grips on my arms and hands, I could see Guy in front, his face red and contorted, crying as the police continued to force him forward through the pain, through the lines of police men and women, standing, gazing, many cheering and jeering as we were forced along, not a single one moved to concern by what was happening.

Everything had simplified now - I felt very scared, concerned just to survive what was happening. I realised, in fear, that there was nobody but police in these streets. Again, at times, it was eerily quiet - I heard one horse snorting as we were forced past the line, yards away. Beyond pain and fear, it was trully sickening to experience that atmosphere around me, an atmosphere of brutality and violence, with indifference or even pleasure oozing out at our pain and humiliation.

We were banged up against a wall, our arms still jammed unrelentingly behind our backs, despite Guy's obvious pain, caused, it seemed, from damage already done to his shoulder. When we moved our heads to make the only contact possible, he was dragged roughly further along the wall, away from me. Behind us, a large, green police coach was parked, full of policemen, waiting in reserve. They were sitting around tables, playing cards, some looking casually out and laughing at what they saw. My only concern then was to be as passive as possible, to do or say nothing that might 'provoke' more violence that we were helpless to prevent and which would be seen by nobody who would be willing to tell the truth, or dare to. I remember trying hard to imagine Jean and Lara and Scarlett, of touching them, of tenderness. In a way, I could not quite focus on what was happening or comprehend its reality, although I knew that it was real enough. And I knew as well that it was only marginal, in terms of violence, the merest hint of state power and force. Yet that made it worse, both because of the real fear of worse and because it forced a kind of emotional recognition of the terrible forms and extremes state violence, legitimised, had taken and took now -perhaps even at that moment - in, say, South Africa. And it was emotionally disorientating to have switched so quickly from being mixed up with the oblivious

shopping crowd in Oxford Street, to being banged up against a wall, derided, feeling hatred all around me. A police sergeant walked up in black riding boots, telling the men who were holding us that the van that would take us to Bow Street was on its way, but had been delayed. He did not even look at Guy or at me. It was as though we were not there at all as people - just useless objects to be transported from one place to another. Just afterwards, I caught a tiny glimpse of banners, of protesters marching, streets away, perhaps making a way between cordons and barriers, to Grosvenor Square. Not seen or known, it felt as though we were a million miles away.

After about ten more minutes, they released their grips on us, by degrees, and then released them altogether and pushed us into the police coach behind. Every time Guy moved his arm, his shoulder gave great pain. On the coach, I tried to comfort him, holding and hugging him, probably as much because of what we had both experienced, as because of his pain. Behind me, came a chorus of jeers and whistles - "queers", "homos", "queers". It was loud and crude, like a gang of kids at a football match, chanting racist slogans. There was no difference really, except that it was legitimised, beyond the law. Across the bus and facing them, a sergeant sat calmly, ignoring us and ignoring the other men, but with a faint smile on his face. Beside him, on the seat, absurdly, was a newish copy of a paperback, a book on Proust. Absurd, because it struck me that, in snatched moments between witnessing what was happening, with no concern at all, he was reading about this sensitive writer. Perhaps it was the book that was out of place.

By the coach door, presumably guarding it, a young police officer was standing. He had not joined in the abuse and, in catching his eyes,

I sensed that, in some way, he was not a part of what was happening. A few minutes later, he got out his cigarettes (Marlboro - thank you America!) and offered one to Guy and to me. I guess he will never read this, though I wish that he would. The cigarette was welcome - I was shaking as I took it - but the gesture and the eye contact there with it was immensely more important. I suppose that only about twenty minutes had passed since we had crossed the barriers in Grosvenor Square, but it felt like a very long time and it had felt, as well, as though we had fallen by error into the company of alien creatures. The pain came through the understanding that this was not so, that those around us were human beings, no less than Guy and myself. In denying that to us, they were denying it for themselves and that denial was a rejection of everything of any value. In the end, by the standards that this century has taught us to see as normal, their aggression had been mild, limited, but the atmosphere behind that violence, the sense of absolute hatred and of no concern, was truly frightening. I trusted my senses and they told me that these people were quite prepared to inflict pain, were able and willing to use their power to bully, intimidate and humiliate, in the knowledge that they could get away with it and were licensed for brutality.

The policeman who had given us cigarettes had not yet been completely absorbed into that. His look had shown the faintest glimmer of concern and that glimmer was a retention of his own sense of being human. I thank him for that, but know that humanity should have made him desperately ashamed to have been where he was, and is. Yet the tiny incident helped me to retain something within - these people were brutalised and brutal, but they were people and not aliens and I would never want to do to them what they did to us. James Baldwin is right and that is why the peace movement is

charged not just with the immense task of ridding our world of all weapons of mass destruction, but with keeping that basic, precious sense of humanity alive, not just as abstract theory but, vitally, as a force, informing every action, every protest. The two tasks are indivisible, just as it is not possible to cut off the hideous reality of nuclear weapons from the dehumanising destructive forces that have rampaged through the century.

Sooner or later, people were bound to see through the lies perpetrated by the nuclear states, by the two aggressive superpowers bent on world domination and the client states they crudely manipulate and control. It was bound to happen, if even for no other reason than, whatever is not held in common, all people have a desire to live. That has begun to happen and as it does and as it grows, so the nuclear states become desperate and lies give way to force. Force demands battalions of functionaries, a militarised, brutalised police force to crush dissent. And that is what is happening in Britain and it is happening now. People need to wake up and face that reality. And any and every politician who is truly concerned with peace and with freedom needs to wake up to that, for it is happening even as they play out sterile political games, in the old way, in parliament. I have suffered very little in my life, but I believe I have at least some sense of, some alertness to the suffering that has occurred and is occurring now in so many places across the world. What I experienced around me in twenty minutes, behind the police-protected American Embassy, had no connection with 'community policing', or the 'friendly local bobby'. But there was a true line of connection with what is happening in South Africa, what happened in Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany. It is a line of connection that has to be recognised now -

the police gathered in waiting, waiting for conflict, were on some kind of leash, just, but they knew what they might do unleashed and they were prepared for that.

What we had done was to dissent, to refuse to obey. We had offered no violence and given no resistance. It had not mattered at all. We were the enemy on that day, instead of the miners or those desperately defending jobs and rights at Wapping. We were the enemy, so it was legitimate to treat us as though we were not human. Kenneth Newman will probably not read this either, but it has to be known that he is creating a militarised, brutalised police force, a force not there to police society, but to crush dissent through violence and intimidation. Behave or beware - that was the message spat out behind the American Embassy.

The men who had arrested us so brutally eventually displayed the almost schizophrenic twist of behaviour that I have experienced often that is very jarring, scaring. In the police van taking us to Bow Street police station, they were quiet and calm. One chatted to another about being kept up the previous night by his young, unsettled, crying child. Another asked Guy how his arm was and, using knowledge he had gained, as he told the others, from a recent First Aid course, advised Guy on the best position to hold his arm to minimise the pain. They were the same people who had damaged the shoulder.

At Bow Street, a large room had been specially prepared as a charging centre, no doubt in anticipation of a profusion of arrests during the demonstration and we discovered that we had been the first two people to have been arrested! I refused to give any information other than my name and address. As had happened many times before, I was told that if I did not give my date of birth I would be detained in custody until I appeared in court. As before, it was a

lie. I think I have to accept as normal the police willingness to lie. In our society, in order to tell the truth to my children, I have to tell them never to believe what police officers might say. Large, crude lies, larded over with small ones - that is the politics of the nuclear state. On Monday evening, frightened and concerned, my daughter had watched film of intensified military activity at USAF Lakenheath and been told that it was all just a part of a normal NATO exercise. On Tuesday, she had woken early as usual to prepare for school. She turned on her radio and heard the news of the bombing of Libya; heard that the raid had been carried out by F1-11 bombers and that these planes had flown from Lakenheath.

I was reminded that the new police act was operational. I was searched (and reminded that I could be strip searched), charged with obstructing a police officer in the course of his duty and told that, if I did not allow myself to be fingerprinted and photographed, 'reasonable force' could be used to achieve those ends. I did not refuse - I still felt very shaken by my experience of the Metropolitan Police's understanding of the words 'reasonable force'. As all this was happening, events at Grosvenor Square kept running through my head and I wondered what would happen if, at some point, I was found guilty of a crime - if this could happen when my innocence was presumed. After my tobacco and matches were taken away, I was taken down to a cell. It was gloomily lit, white tiled from ground to half way up, where the tiles gave way to brown painted brick. Dried blood stained the bench by the door of the cell and similar stains were smeared across the white tiling above the bench. I had been arrested at just before one o'clock. I was released, on police bail, just after 10.30 p.m. In that time, I was given one paper cup of lukewarm water,

at the fourth time of asking. I requested, as was my right, to make a single 'phone call when I arrived at Bow Street, just before two o'clock. I still had not made that call when I was released.

By shouting, I managed bits of echod conversation with Guy in another cell. He was seen, eventually, by a police doctor and given pain killers to ease the pain from the damaged shoulder. It was only when I was alone in the cell that I was able to realise and feel how shaken I was by what had happened. It took most of the afternoon to overcome those feelings of gloom, sadness, emptiness. The police, above, had allowed me to keep a book - Beckett's novel trilogy. It was very difficult, somehow, to retain concentration but, during the afternoon, I read the opening thirty pages of 'Molloy' - life pared down to the core, very bleak, but very real, loss and suffering delineated in stunningly beautiful language, studded with sentences that had an almost musical purity:

"From there he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea and then these self-same hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden vallies that the eye divines from sudden shifts of colour and then from other signs for which there are no words, nor even thoughts."

I read some pages quietly to myself in the cell. It was exactly a week since I had discovered that Beckett was eighty. Maybe reading a bit of 'Molloy' was my tribute, by accident. It felt as though it was the right time and place. Long life, Mr. Beckett!

Just before seven in the evening, another person was put in my cell. At first, it was difficult to adjust to this. It felt like an intrusion, a

disruption of my silence. That feeling quickly seemed foolish, because it was the most needed experience, in a week of such experiences of contact with a stranger who was not a stranger. Perhaps Malcolm from Brighton could explain better than me how we got to having a conversation about his theatre collective in Brighton, in a gloomy Victorian cell in Bow Street police station, where it was conceivable that Jack the Ripper would have been detained and Gladstone-bagless, if they had caught him.

My spirits were greatly lifted by Malcolm's account of a spontaneous mass blockade in Oxford Street, where he had been arrested. This had occurred midway through the afternoon, involving thousands and causing traffic chaos right in the middle of London. I discovered later that Nottingham friends had helped to begin that blockade. The feelings that had made that action possible, on such a scale, with no planning, seemed to me to be connected to what I had felt on arriving that morning in Grosvenor Square. A way of breaking the circuit of control, of communicating dissent directly and causing disruption of the flow of process that acted as a smokescreen behind which the nuclear planners carried on. Malcolm was also the first person to tell me of the crude and violent police intervention at the end of the blockade. I was to learn much more of that from others later. It came as no surprise at all.

At just after 10.30 p.m., I was escorted up to the charging centre room and told that I had one last chance to give my date of birth. If not, I would be held in custody until a court appearance on Monday morning. By this time, I felt strong again, partly through my own efforts during the afternoon, partly through Malcolm and partly through the news of Oxford Street. It was only a date of birth and obvious

that they would get that somehow, just as the Ministry of Defence police had, despite my consistent refusals. But it was a defiance, a refusal to obey - something retained, despite the arrest, the intimidation, the abuse, the humiliation in being photographed and fingerprinted and the hours in custody. So, it felt good to again refuse, point blank, quietly, looking at the sergeant on the other side of the makeshift desk. He stared back and told me that my "fucking address" had been confirmed anyway, gave me a charge sheet and the rest of my possessions and said I could go. I found out, on getting back home, that local police had called and confirmed through Jean that I was who I said I was and lived there. They asked her for my date of birth. Jean refused.

It was a great relief to see Dave and Barbara at the entrance to Bow Street police station. Malcolm was released at about the same time and Guy was released about an hour later. There was a small, tired-looking group, clustered together in a tiny waiting room, waiting for the release of friends, as well as two people from CND's legal support unit, hanging on until everybody arrested was accounted for. The police around were cold and belligerent - we three were actually threatened again with arrest if we did not move away from the station entrance.

I stayed the night in South London, with Dave, Barbara and Pete, at Pete's parents' house. They are quakers and I felt an almost tangible calm and peacefulness when we arrived there, very late; a stark contrast to the police station and the ancient, tiled cell. In the morning, Pete's father was to drive off to Molesworth, for a service outside the gate at Peace Corner, where the Peace Chapel had stood until a few days before.

I heard more of the violent confrontation



Blocade, Oxford Street; London - Saturday April 19th.
Photo. Colin Huggins.

that had flared up at the end of the Oxford Street blockade. It was clear that, for some, at least, it had cast a cloud over the protest. It was certain that the reactionary media would try to make capital out of it. It was possible, certainly credible, that some, a few, involved in the demonstration, would have wanted violent confrontation with the police. It was more credible still that the Metropolitan police would have relished such confrontation. Personally, my own belief in protest that is non-violent, generated by a passion that opposes the micro- and macro-violence confronting us, grows all the more each time I experience the sheer ugliness of violence, its dark, dehumanising power and the way it corrodes the soul. And I felt that way no less after what happened to me at Grosvenor Square and after hearing the many accounts of crude police aggression in Oxford Street, given later by friends who had been there and whose words I knew I could trust. As the facade of lies cracks and crumbles and more and more people see the reality of the nuclear state, that state will seek confrontation, as it did in the miners' strike and as it is doing now at Wapping. The level of provocation is bound to increase with the peace movement. Oxford Street gave warning of that. Yet, surely, the grotesque chain of violence and counter-violence has to be broken, for it has claimed too many lives and caused too much suffering. We have a nation of the dead around us now, haunting all those who dare open their eyes wide and look at our twentieth century history and its spread of killing fields and killing cities.

Such a belief cannot be fixed, like an iron law. At some level, people have to defend themselves or die and that is happening now in many places in the world. I believe in non-violence, but could never condemn a person using violence where nothing else could save them, or those they love. But we do live in the age of Exterminism, on the

edge of destruction beyond comprehension and it will not be violence that rids us of that threat. We can save ourselves if we wake up in time and see, and refuse to live any longer in the shadow of terror. Too many of us are still living with madness and pretending that it is sanity. Too many of us remain tamely prepared to obey the few who lead us ever nearer to a real waste-land. Things can change and will change, when the majority have the courage to understand that civil obedience has brought us to the edge of extinction and that civil disobedience is the only road to the future.

We left the house early on the Sunday morning - Pete, Dave and Barbara had to get to a CND national council meeting in North London. On the underground north, they discussed the coming meeting, possible tactics, political disagreements, undercurrents and bickers. I knew, from experience, that it was probably necessary, but felt outside of it and glad to be so. Back in the Autumn, my heavy involvement in the peace movement had headed me towards immersion in things at a national level, in the intricate web of politics that had been spun from the massive growth of the movement over the previous five or six years. I could not really cope with that. In some ways, that was simply the consequence of personal weakness, yet the week had concretised for me a sense that it was not just that. The peace movement has always got to be on its guard against external pressures and attacks. But the more it grows, the more it is also likely to be threatened and undermined from within, simply because it brings together, in fragile unity, so many groups and organisations, so many diverse beliefs and creeds, producing a plethora of political agendas. That must create a tension. The danger is that this tension will spawn an atmosphere of narrow political intrigue, with individuals and groups

forever competing for control of tactics and direction. If that happens, our strength will be diminished, our energy and passion sapped and weakened. It is not inevitable and will not happen if, retained at living centre of our activity is recognition of what is shared and what binds us together. If recognition of that cannot ensure a creative unity, then we would have only ourselves to blame for what would follow. At the end of a week that had been so chilling and yet had also brought home so richly the meaning of solidarity and of strength in action, it was disconcerting to be reminded that political manoeuvring still went on. I do not care if that sounds naive - the old politics are eminently sophisticated and they have taken us to the brink. The peace movement can afford to have nothing to do with them.

We separated at Euston and so, soon afterwards, I found myself at King's Cross, with two hours to spare, before the next St. Pancras train to Nottingham. Now, back in Nottingham, I'm finishing this, though events since Sunday have only served to emphasise that the Libyan crisis is not really over and could flare up again at any time. I heard, in a speech truly mind-wrenching in its degree of hypocrisy, Reagan declare at one and the same time that he had no quarrel with the Libyan people (strange comfort indeed for the families of those killed by his F1-11s) but will act again if terrorism continues. In this country, with feeble caveats, intended to appease continuing public disquiet, the government has continued to insist that the United States acted in self-defence and legally. America's aim of blackmailing European countries into line (the U.S. line) through violence has, in part at least, succeeded - condemnations of the bombings have melted away to be replaced by appeasing movement towards action against Libya, the thinning down of Peoples' Bureaux personnel and, most hapless and sycho-phantic of all, a spate of deportations of

Libyans, mainly students. Again, Britain has taken the lead in this rash of deportations, still gathering momentum as I write and as, remarkably, successive European governments discover that Libyan students were, in fact, inchoate terrorists all the time. The message seems to be that terrorism, U.S. style, works. Lines of a song by Dylan keep running through my head:

"This world isn't ruled by democracy,
You'd better get that in your head,
This world is ruled by violence,
But I guess that's better left unsaid."

Already there have been retaliatory terrorist actions, some revenge killings in the ravaged, splintered Lebanon. What happens next is anyone's guess.

Back in Nottingham, peaceful protest has continued - yesterday I was involved in a rooftop occupation of local Conservative party headquarters, drawing attention to the fact that all three Nottingham Tory MPs backed Thatcher's support of the United States terrorism. It remains to be seen how sustained the rich burst of protest activity will be, but it is now beyond question that most people in Britain believed that the bombings were wrong and not justified. Danger signs flashed. I doubt whether that will be completely buried or forgotten.

It has been a bit of a struggle to resist feeling drained and emptied. I was bailed to appear back at Bow Street the day after coming back to Nottingham. I was not able to make that, but my reasons were not accepted and a warrant has been issued for my arrest. Just after a court date was given for non-payment of fines relating to earlier protest at Molesworth and so, at the end of May, I will join that growing number going to prison for resisting the nuclear state. Guy came round on Monday - I had not seen him after leaving Bow

Street. His arm is healing. It was good to see him and a bit moving as well. It seemed, for a few seconds, to remind us both of the twenty minutes on Saturday.

It seems pointless to try and draw firm and fixed conclusions from what happened, particularly as the week of the Libyan bombings brought home so dramatically that the politics of exterminism is a process unfolding all the time, with an ending in the future that is beyond rational prediction. Except that the future could be now. Always. The process may appear to be still, unchanging, but it never is. Libya confirms that 'crisis' can flash up at any time and any 'crisis' can lead to chaos. If each person could recognise that simple and obvious fact and absorb its terrifying meaning into their life, our chance would come to move clear of the perpetual, hideous threat that should surely not be tolerable, although most continue to tolerate it. The movement and change within the process occurs not in the opposed but identical politico-military elites, controlling all our destinies - they have revealed their deadly hands long ago, but in the way that ordinary people, the victims in waiting, come to recognise and respond to the threat they face. The bombing of Libya jerked many people awake and it was the peace movement, not politicians, who voiced the feelings of fear and outrage provoked by the U.S. action. Not all will dare to stay alert and awake; fewer still, probably, will act. But what happened should teach us all that there can be changes in feeling, understanding and response. Things are not static and people are not fools. That is a vital and encouraging lesson for all of us working for peace.

In Nottingham, I was part of a protest that was spontaneous and passionate and strong. It gave me a true understanding of what real solidarity meant and what it could mean and lead to. And there is so much evidence to suggest that what

happened in Nottingham was typical of towns and cities the length and breadth of Europe. It happened in a crisis because, I believe, that forced so many of us to see and feel what was important and act accordingly. We should learn from that. Perhaps we have to learn. We reacted thus in a crisis, in immediate response to a crude and murderous example of Superpower politics. But had we forgotten that all we had believed and spoken and written before was not just passionate rhetoric, but the naked truth? For, if we are telling the truth, what week is not crisis week? We live through crisis every day, crisis that will not go until the threat of holocaust goes and justice and freedom reign in place of terror across the world. If many of us were on the streets again in response to a crisis, in the context we know and fear, then perhaps the week showed that some of us also had to wake up from sleep.

We know all this in our hearts because it has been the passionate core of the peace movement for years. Yet the crisis within the total crisis occurred as burgeoning energy was being directed into agendas suspiciously similar to the old-style political agendas; the world of attractively packaged but empty promises that had stranded us in a nuclear cul-de-sac. Over the past year, I have heard many people committed to the peace movement begin to talk about the politics of disarmament, as though it was a question of slow and gradual movement, like tax reform. And I have seen people concentrate more and more, not on what is urgent and obvious all the time, but on what reliable polls and surveys inform them people are likely to accept as change, prepared to shape policies in the light of what is deemed politically acceptable within the current climate of public opinion. But that is the road back to the dead end politics which the peace movement rose up and flourished to oppose. The road based on reliance on the leaders finding the solutions, while the people are told to be forever patient.

waiting for change that never really comes. Many people seem to have forgotten that the peace movement, in recent times, arose to fill a vacuum, a deadly impasse, out of peoples' passionate refusal to tolerate any more the politics of exterminism. Its phenomenal upsurge was never propelled by a willingness to shape policies according to what people had been cajoled and conditioned into believing they wanted. It was surely more basic than that and more profound - propelled passionately by what people needed, not what they had been taught to want, or accept.

The conditions that created the peace movement have not changed yet and demand the same urgency of response. If it took the Libyan crisis to jerk us back to that understanding, then, at least we can learn and refuse to become emmeshed in the politics of glossy packages and slow reform, for such politics have no place in the era of exterminism. We know our only sane route away from disaster is to rid this country of every nuclear weapon and every nuclear base and to abandon any link with a nuclear alliance controlled by a state in control of half the world and more and always prepared, as Libya showed, to use its unsurpassed military might to maintain and extend that control. To reject without qualification an alliance that, not a jot less than the Warsaw Pact, is prepared to hold each one of us and all our children as nuclear hostages, in perpetuity. We know that it is only on that basis that this country can cast off the role of nuclear oppressor and join all those peoples in the world who reject the politics of exterminism and work for peace, resisting the will of two arrogant Superpowers who have revealed, on countless occasions, that human life is always expedient if it dares to conflict with their ruthlessly greedy desires for power and domination.

The peace movement has already moved many people in that direction. There has been more movement in that direction in the last six years than in the thirty five years before. We have to move more people and move them further, but surely there can be no compromise in that, because the needs remain there just as urgently as ever. There is no place for intricate and subtle piecemeal political agendas that assume endless tomorrows in which to reform things further, bit by bit. All my adult life, I have seen and been sickened by the endless turmoil and strife within the radical, politicised elements in Britain, a confusion dissipating energy and direction.. At times, I have a nightmare vision of groups huddled in makeshift shelters, in anticipation of the bomb, yet arguing until they burn as to what is the correct line to take. And recently I have begun to fear that kind of process arising again within the peace movement. Perhaps it is that worry that makes me talk of a 'peace movement', although, to many, it is a cloudy and nebulous term. I use it because it is a point of reference to what unites people, or what can unite people. The name assumes an understanding of what has been done in our century and what will be done, unless people wake and demand change, with one voice. Across Britain, across the continent, that voice can demand one fundamental change and has to - an end to weapons of mass destruction, to the insane politics of power and greed that created them and uses them to terrorise the world.

That demand has to be beyond compromise and every single day it has to be demanded NOW. The demand has to be a total one, uniquely uncompromised, because the threat is a total one, unique, never once giving a guarantee of a tomorrow, far less a sequence of the same, when gradual reform might occur. If we cannot recognise that, resist all compromise and act on the single, unifying, necessary agenda, we

may be given no chance to act on any other.

Perhaps we have become ashamed to be raw and naive, our energy dissipated by the sweet voices of compromise, who never tire of expanding on the intricacies and complexities of our situation. Yet people were raw and naive in the week of the Libyan bombings and nobody seemed ashamed of that. Because how intricate and complicated were the feelings of people in Tripoli and Benghazi in the early hours of that Tuesday morning? And how complicated would our vision have been if, hours later, the USSR had declared the American action intolerable? A sense of urgency washed away the fog of compromise and complexity from peoples' eyes; but the need for urgency was there before the Libyan bombings and it is there now.

We all live in a country riddled with foreign bases and bombers and nuclear weapons. We live in a country which is part of an alliance which is prepared to destroy the world. We live in a country that, step by step, is dismantling democracy and evolving and refining the methods of a police state, in order to stamp out dissent and protest, the moment it is experienced as a threat. Those of us committed to peace can respond to that by playing at being politicians - cool, reasonable and calculating. We can be like the politicians who, in the wake of the raid on Libya, spent hours debating whether or not Reagan's action contravened Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, who dare not call murderers by their name for fear of disturbing the status quo.

We can be like that, but I do not believe the peace movement has become a vital, living reality by being like that. We have seen where that road is heading, the road lined already by 130,000,000 corpses and more. We do not have to be like that and we cannot afford to be. We have to keep on telling the truth, the whole truth. That truth still frightens many people, but the telling of it

opens eyes every day and when they are open reality is what really frightens and moves people.

In the wake of the Libyan bombings, there seemed to be a sense of connectedness amongst those who protested, a unifying spirit, basic, precious, tuned into life. I think it is that spirit that has begun to break the nuclear chain and can, as nothing else can, succeed in finally breaking that chain before it obliterates us all. As that spirit continues to spread, so people will demand change and now, not in some imagined, unguaranteed future. A lot of people have become familiar with a song about the Diggers. I've got to know it through hearing Billy Bragg. I do not know who wrote it, but I'm sure that neither that person would have minded, nor would Billy Bragg, that I use it now. Because I believe that it is the spirit of the Diggers that we should carry with us in all our work for peace and not the spirit of the politicians. For St. George's Hill, we can read our planet itself. In the age of Exterminism, we are all Diggers, reclaiming what is ours. They will try to cut us down, but they cannot cut everybody down. And if we do not defy them now, they'll cut us down anyway, whether by intent or accident or error.

In 1649, to St. George's Hill,
A ragged band they called the diggers came to
show the peoples' will.
They defied the landlords, they defied the laws,
They were the dispossessed reclaiming what
was theirs.

We come in peace they said, to dig and sow,
We come to work the lands in common and to
make the waste lands grow,
The earth divided, we will make whole,
So it will be a common treasury for all.

The sin of property we do disdain,
No man has any right to buy and sell the
earth for private gain.
By theft and murder they took the land,
Now everywhere the walls spring up at their
command.

They make the laws to chain us well,
The clergy dazzle us with heaven, then they
damn us into hell.
We will not worship the God they serve,
The God of greed who feeds the rich while poor
men starve.

We work, we eat together, we need no swords,
We will not bow to the masters or pay rent to
the Lords.
We are free men though we are poor,
We diggers all stand up for glory, stand up now.

From the men of property the order came,
They sent the hired men and troopers to wipe
out the diggers' claim,
Tear down their cottages, destroy their corn,
They were dispersed but still their vision
lingers on.

You poor take courage, you rich take care,
The earth was made a common treasury for
everyone to share,
All things in common, all people one,
We come in peace, the orders came to cut them
down.

Thanks,

To all my friends in Nottingham
and so many other places, who
work for peace, in peace.

To Diane and John and Nottingham
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i.e. virtually everything.

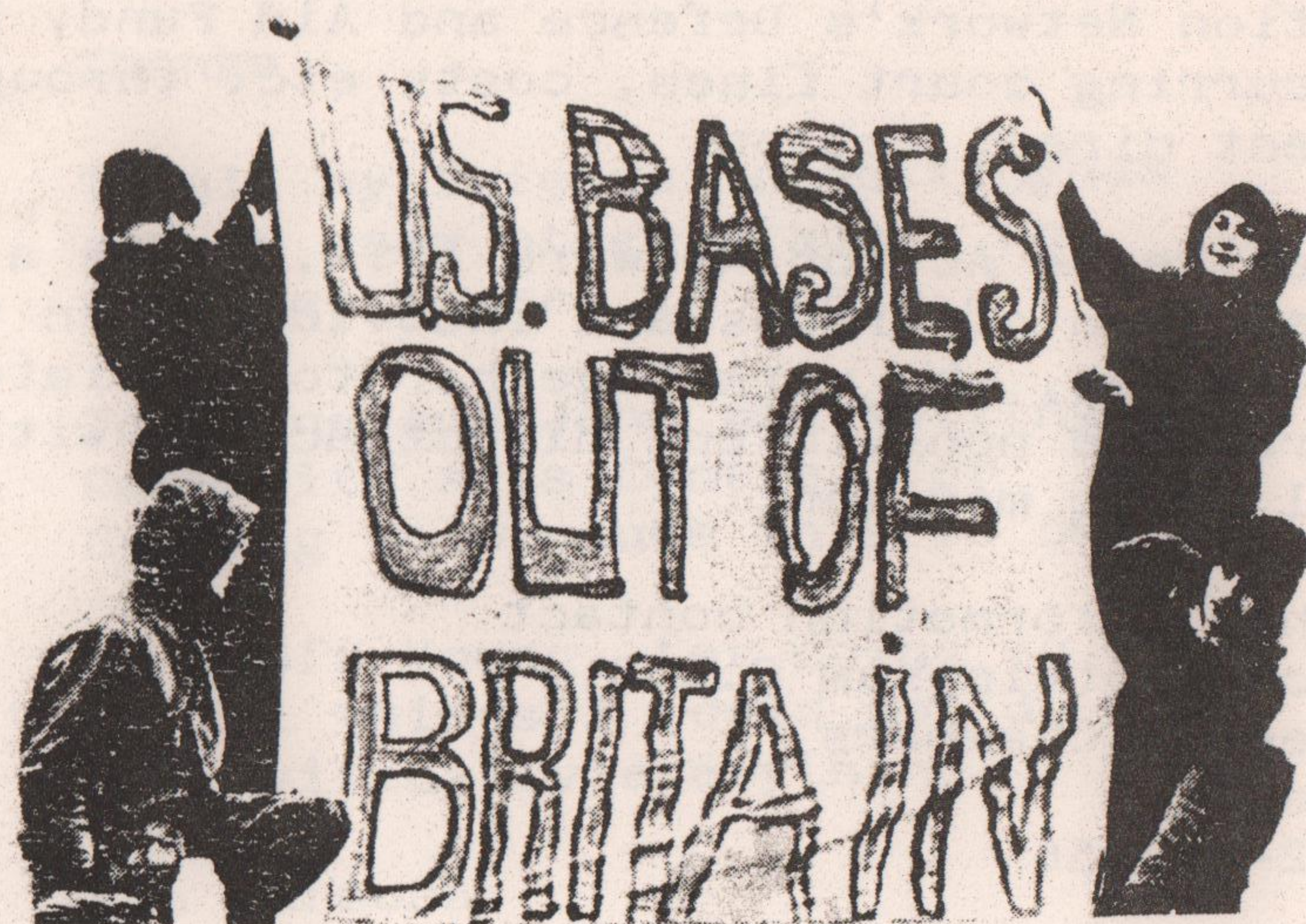
Les Parsons.

All proceeds from this book will go to Nottingham
Peace Action Network's Defence and Aid Fund, for
those incurring court fines, costs etc. through
non-violent direct action.

Nottingham Peace Action Network (P.A.N.) is a
loose coalition of groups and individuals in the
Nottingham area, who work together to initiate
and co-ordinate non-violent direct action within
the local peace movement.

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Which Side Are You On ?



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