

Nuclear protests at Williams 'a way of life'

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

When they sat in the driveway at Williams International Corp. a year ago, 54 peace activists expected to spend Christmas in jail. They never dreamed that decision to trespass would lead to a year of legal haggling.

While their cases inch through the courts, many of those same people will return to the Commerce Township defense contractor's plant Sunday. Some even plan another sit-in Monday morning, knowing it will land them back in Oakland County Jail for the holidays.

"It's a way of life. We're very determined," said the Rev. Peter Dougherty, a Catholic priest who belongs to the Lansing-based faith group Covenant for Peace.

A YEAR AGO Covenant for Peace organized a weeklong protest at Williams International's 64-acre research, development and manufacturing facility at 2330 W. Maple, just west of Hagerly Road.

Founded in 1955 in Birmingham, the maker of small gas-turbine engines is a target of peace groups because its product powers low-flying cruise missiles.

A version of the cruise missile engine is used in WASP II, a small, one-person flying device.

Williams also manufactures turbine engines for cars and trucks, industrial gas turbines and low-pollution turbines for generating electric power from natural gas and coal.

FROM NOV. 28 to Dec. 3, 1983, peace groups tried to block the firm's entrance as employees arrived for work. More than 50 people were jailed for breaking a court injunction against trespassing on the defense supplier's property.

Their court cases received widespread publicity when the Oakland County Prosecutor's office charged them not only with trespassing but also with conspiracy, a more serious charge which could bring a year in jail. The penalty for trespassing is 30 days.

"We support their freedom of speech, but they don't have a right to trespass," explained Richard Thompson, Oakland County's chief assistant prosecuting attorney. "We are going to enforce the law."

WHILE 50 activists still await final court action, many are expected to be back at Williams Sunday.

Covenant for Peace is planning a 3 p.m. prayer service to mark last year's Advent season. Advent marks the start of the Christmas season.

The legal vigil on the public easement also will commemorate the anniversary of the murder of four American churchwomen in El Salvador and the day when black Detroiters Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a segregated bus in Montgomery, Ala., touching off the civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s.

Sunday's theme — "Patience in the Darkness" — stems from organizers' concern over not just the nuclear arms race but also U.S. involvement in Central America.

On Nov. 11 about 180 area peace activists gathered for non-violence training in the event of a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua. The nationwide "Contingency Plan" involves sit-ins in legislators' offices, including the Birmingham office of U.S. Rep. William Birmingham, a consistent supporter of President Ronald Reagan's foreign policies.

"We realize we have to be patient. Things are pretty dark," said Sister Liz Walters, a nun who does peace work for Groundwork for a Just World. "But we will not give up," she said.

MONDAY MORNING, the Ann Ar-

bor Peace Community is organizing a driveway sit-in at Williams. About 15-20 people are expected to break a circuit court injunction against trespassing.

Like last year, they will conduct a non-violence training session Sunday night to prepare people for the "action." Activists and their supporters will gather in St. Vincent Catholic Church, Pontiac, the same spot where police searched protesters' belongings a year ago.

"I don't know if it will be raided. I think that kind of backfire," kidded Dougherty.

While expecting 15-20 people to sit in the driveway Monday, organizers don't really know how many will turn out for the civil disobedience.

Both sides believe the conspiracy charges by the prosecutor's office have deterred people from protesting.

Also a concern are the "open ended" sentences imposed by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge James S. Thor-

burn. Eight activists are before Michigan Court of Appeals fighting his attempts to keep them in jail until they promise not to return to Williams.

THE PROSECUTION has been unhappy with local District Court rulings in the peace cases. While Thompson would like to see defendants get more than just trespassing sentences, he thinks the conspiracy charges did discourage protesters. And he will consider charging conspiracy again if the facts support it, he said.

Pointing to the bombing of a Toronto plant which makes guidance systems for the cruise missile, the law-enforcement official said he is determined to prevent that kind of escalation.

"We've been disappointed in the court rulings, but that's part of our job," Thompson said.

"But I think firm police action has deterred acts of lawlessness."



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

During a peace vigil the day before the weeklong Williams protests began a year ago, worshippers held small votive candles.

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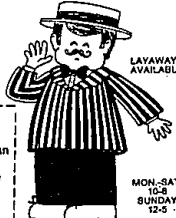
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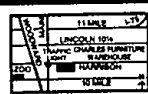
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NOTICE OF CORRECTION

The **MAIN ENTREE** advertisement which appeared in the Monday, November 26, 1984 Oakland County edition of the Observer & Economist was partially in error. The "8 lbs. Large Scallops (Sea)" should have read "3 lbs. Large Scallops (\$60)." This was an error in the newspaper composition and not an attempt on the part of the Main Entree to misrepresent itself or its merchandise. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused the Main Entree, its staff or our readers. The Main Entree may be reached by calling 532-8806.

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