

Peaceful protest takes practice

Both sides stand firm but gentle

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

IT WASN'T Tom Parker's first anti-war demonstration. This time, though, he was arrested protesting instead of protesting.

"I've been on the other side," said the Oakland County Sheriff's deputy, who opposed the Vietnam War as a college student.

"And I've got kids. I don't want to see a nuclear war."

Also committed to uphold the law, Parker gently led senior citizen blockaders out of the way of cars driving into Williams International Corp. in Walled Lake.

The protesters, on their way to Oakland County Jail, smiled while quietly talking about their mission to stop Williams workers from making engines for low-flying cruise missiles.

The Williams "confrontation" — over almost as soon as it began at dawn Monday — was as peaceful as its aim. But both sides worked hard to make sure it would be.

Behind the scenes, the blockaders and the deputies were "psyching" themselves for a meeting designed to disappoint the TV cameras.

"How do you creatively make that connection with another person whose heart you're trying to touch when your body is blocking?" the Rev. Peter Dougherty asked during a non-violence training session for blockaders.

EXPECTED TO LAND 40 people in jail by Friday, the protest is one of several United States and Canadian actions this week against defense suppliers.

Williams International was chosen locally because its gas turbine engines power cruise missiles. Protesters also were outside the manufacturer's Ogden, Utah, facility.

Williams' 1,450 employees also make turbine engines for cars and trucks, industrial gas turbines and low-pollution turbines for generating electric power from natural gas and coal.

Trying to get Williams to cease defense work, Covenant for Peace of East Lansing has distributed leaflets and prayed outside the Walled Lake firm weekly since Jan. 17.

Two trespassing incidents led to an Oakland Circuit Court injunction which the protesters this week disobeyed daily by standing in the driveway and blocking employees cars.

ORGANIZERS STRESSED cooperation. They met with the sheriff's staff and a Walled Lake ministerial group to discuss their plans and sent an open letter door-to-door in the blockade area. Williams employees were also advised of the blockade.

And the protesters — many of whom came from other cities and states to spend time in Oakland County Jail — were given a list of guidelines to follow.

The "discipline" called upon protesters to "acknowledge our own complicity and to claim our personal responsibility in the arms race" and to "remain, especially in action which is firm and strong and bold, always humble and gentle, never self-righteous."

The Rev. William Kellerman urged them to approach the blockade in a spirit of "mindfulness and thoughtfulness."

"There is a genuine interest in dialogue; not just 'Let us tell you' but a willingness to listen," the Methodist minister told the crowd.

"What if someone is dedicated to violence? Wouldn't that ruin the protest?" asked a participant.

"We're not gonna take a pledge," replied the Detroit clergyman. "Let's just say they (the opposition) are all our friends — while we disagree with some of them more or less."

SUNDAY AND TUESDAY non-violence training sessions gave blockaders and their supporters an idea of what to expect during civil disobedience.

They were divided into groups — police, peace keepers, protesters and vigilers — and ran through a practice blockade. Then participants talked about how they felt in the roles.



Candles were part of a legal prayer service Sunday marking the week-long event.

"Gandhi was creative in a way many people weren't. He created a bond of love with those he opposed," said Dougherty, a Catholic priest.

"They left as his friends. But working that out is very difficult." Participants discussed whether to talk with the police, lock arms or walk or be dragged away from the scene.

Supporters — paired up one-to-one with blockaders — talked about whether they should sing, clap or cheer.

"Singing sounds like a real good idea. Anything to break down barriers," suggested one protester.

"Clapping makes it like a spectator thing. I don't like it," added another, suggesting that arresting officers would be offended by a crowd cheering blockaders.

"But the police shouldn't be there. We're not there to baby their consciences," objected one man.

The experience was an eye-opener for some involved.

"I felt like arguing and asking 'Why?' said one of the pretend protesters, after being dragged into a police car made up of chairs.

"People are heavy. And the more they resisted, the tireder I got," said one woman. "I started to get angry."

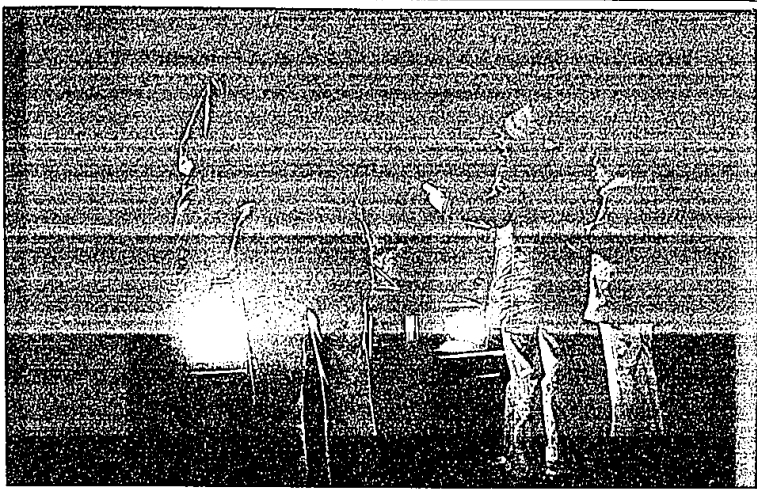
STAYING OVERNIGHT in St. Vincent de Paul Church in Pontiac, the blockaders and their support people were divided into "affinity" groups representing a home city or membership like Detroit Peace Community or the senior citizens. Members slept in the same area and encouraged each other through the week.

When their affinity group manned the blockade and members were arrested, support people followed them to the jail and court. Then they were responsible for contacting families and taking care of needs while blockaders were in jail.

Because so many participants had never been in jail before, Kellerman asked them to look out for

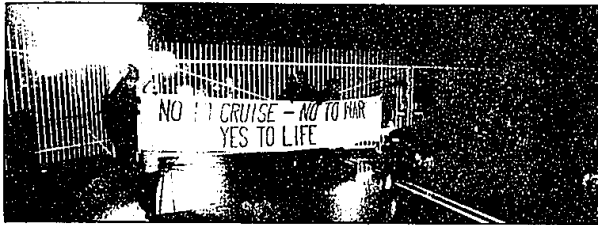


During a mock demonstration, The Rev. Peter Dougherty of Covenant for Peace shows the opposing sides where to stand.



Leading the first blockade attempt Monday were four senior citizens who held hands while standing in front of a car headed into Williams International. Jailed for

the effort were the Rev. Carlon Foltz of Pontiac; Vivienne Kell of Madison Heights; and Pat and Corinne Bruder of Southfield.



Kicking off blockades were senior citizens with a banner.

each other. "Be awake to one another, because that's kind of what Covenant has been at Williams; simply going there and having their eyes open.

"What we bring as a group to Williams is our hearts and a community spirit of nonviolence."

FOR THE POLICE, keeping the Williams driveway and Maple Road clear of people was a real challenge.

The task went to the Tactical Mobile Unit, which is trained in crowd control.

Like the blockaders, officers got an evening's training for the week-long protest. The session also included role play.

"We stressed being polite but firm," explained Capt. Jim Curtis, commander of the unit which practiced carrying people off the pavement and un-linking protesters' arms.

"The organizers are very peaceful and we didn't expect any trouble. Our concern was that invitations were sent out to the public. And this is an ideal situation if someone wants to cause trouble."

The officers reacted calmly, circling the protesters and leading them away to a special booking van. Stretchers were on hand for those who refused to walk.

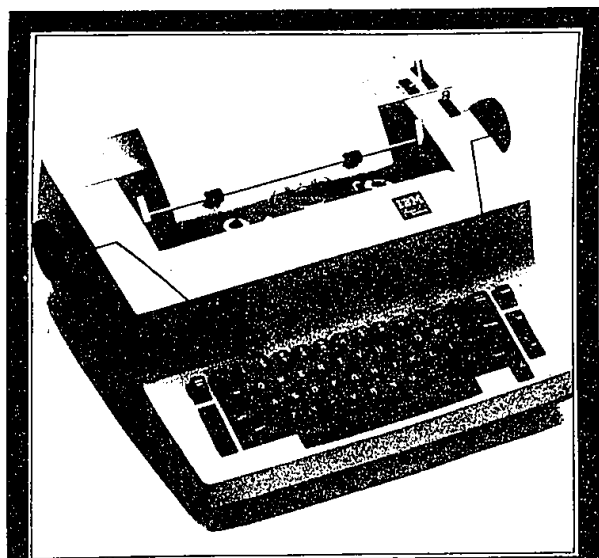
"If they don't hit us, we won't hit them," said one officer, who'd been practicing picking up bodies.

"We don't want to get hurt either."

Chatting with supporters outside Williams after arrests, another officer was told that the goal of the protest is a safer world.

"If that's the whole point and you get it through to people, we're happy, too," said one officer.

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Blockaders and their support people get non-violence training before the week's action begins.