



9. ploughshares - and the Catholic Worker movement

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At a meeting on 11 July 1996, Ciaron O'Reilly made a presentation on the Ploughshares anti nuclear campaign and its origins in the Catholic Worker movement in the USA. Present at the meeting were: Christina Arber, Tricia Allen, John Brierley, Bob Overy, Ciaron O'Reilly (guest speaker), Michael Randle, Carol Rank, Andrew Rigby.

Presentation - [Ciaron O'Reilly](#) [2]

Ciaron spoke about his experiences as a Ploughshares activist living in a Catholic Worker community in Australia, about the history of the Catholic Worker movement, and about the case he had come to Britain to lend his support to, namely the trial of four Ploughshares women facing trial at Liverpool Crown Court for disarming a BAe Hawk warplane destined for Indonesia.

He was born in 1960 in Brisbane in Queensland, which had the reputation of being the most right wing state in Australia, ruled by the Country or National Party for over 30 years. Police corruption and the denial of civil liberties were its outstanding characteristics. He lived close to one of the largest military barracks in Australia and used to play there as a child among the wallabies, snakes and other wildlife. He and other kids would also go into the tunnels built by the military which were very similar to those the Vietcong were building. So in a sense, breaking into army barracks began in his case at a very young age!

He was a cradle Catholic, a 'conscript', and had not really strayed from the flock in terms of ideology. He was educated by the Good Samaritan sisters and the Christian Brothers, - the latter mainly working class and pretty unsophisticated. The title he gave his major assignment in his final year at High School was: 'Is the Church dead, or does it just smell bad?' In this he explored the radical fringes of the Catholic Church. It was in that year, in response to the rising anti-nuclear and anti-uranium movement, that the Queensland government banned all political demonstrations in the state. He had been arrested and beaten up by the police along with hundreds of other people. He went on to university and after a year of hectic demonstrating was challenged to explore what he was for, not just what he was against. He and other Christian friends became interested in anarchism and pacifism and started a group at Griffiths Campus called Two or Three Gathered in His Name. They looked at Tolstoy, Gandhi and others and eventually discovered the Berrigan brothers in the US and the Catholic Worker movement which had been going since the 1930s. In 1982, following graduation, he and others set up a Catholic Worker community, Dorothy Day House, in Australia. In 1984 they established a centre called Justice Products, an outlet for cooperatively produced goods which also educated people in the role of the transnationals. Initially the community itself provided hospitality to aboriginal street kids. Latterly it concentrated on caring for people suffering from mental illness. They financed themselves by cooperative work and making vegetarian soup. They campaigned on such issues as freedom of speech, opposing preparations for nuclear war, prison solidarity, and solidarity with aboriginals.

In 1989 he made a pilgrimage around Catholic Worker communities in the US. He was in Washington DC in 1990 when Thatcher and Bush met at the Pentagon on Hiroshima day and decided to mobilise half-a-million troops for the Persian Gulf. Over the next six months along with three other Catholic Workers he formed a Ploughshares community. On New Years Day 1991 the four of them went to Griffiths Airforce base in upstate New York and disarmed a B52 Bomber with nuclear weapons on board which was on a ten minute scramble. He was arrested, handed over the FBI, imprisoned, and refused to cooperate with bail conditions until the shooting war was over. He was eventually brought to trial and served a year in prison in eight different US jails. He was then arrested in the penitentiary for immigration offences, served a further five weeks in prison before being brought to trial and deported - the good traditional punishment of deportation to Australia. Since then he and others had formed another community in Australia - Gregg Shackleton House, named after a journalist who had been killed on the eve of the invasion of East Timor; his widow, Shirley Shackleton opened the house.

Ciaron then summarised the history and approach of the Catholic Worker movement. It is a faith-based movement rooted in theology; faith seeking understanding would be a way of defining its approach. The Catholic tradition, as Arlo Guthrie pointed out when he converted in the 1970s, is a long and, in his experience, a pluralistic one. It was often attacked for being authoritarian and uptight, but there was a history of movements and orders and renewals



within the church in response to the situations people encountered. Dorothy Day, one of the founders of the movement, was born around the turn of the century and had been a left activist, a suffragette, an opponent of World War I, and a contributor to the paper *The Masses*. She engaged in popular struggles and reported on them, and was very much a modern person. In her late 20s she converted to Catholicism.

Peter Maurin, co-founder of the movement, had, by contrast, a rural background. The second oldest of a large French peasant family, he fled France when he became a conscientious objector. He was influenced by a group of Russian exiles, the personalists. By the end of the 1920s when he was in his fifties, he was something of an itinerant philosopher and a regular orator in Union Square. In a series of what he called 'Easy Essays' he made a critique of capitalism, industrialism and state communism, presenting sophisticated insights in a simply rhyme scheme. He would recite these in a thick French accent at the meetings he addressed.

Dorothy Day met him in the late 1920s. At this stage she felt a personal call to become a Catholic but was also deeply attached to the tradition of activism. Following a labour march on Washington DC, she went to the shrine to pray for guidance, and arrived home to find this itinerant philosopher on her doorstep. Together they created the Catholic Worker. Peter's emphasis was on challenging the structures of society that caused poverty. His programme was for rural communes which would embody the experiment with revolution out in the countryside, a house of hospitality in every parish, and a Christ room for the homeless in every Catholic home. It was a response, at that moment in history, to the two great totalitarian movements of Stalinism and fascism. Instead of coming up with those kind of large responses to things - like an increased welfare state in response to the depression - they concentrated on such things as establishing soup kitchens in the cities. The *Catholic Worker* newspaper attained a circulation of 250,000 in the 1930s, and there were about 60 communities by the end of the decade.

World War II provoked a split in the movement. Dorothy came out strongly for pacifism. This was also part of Peter's tradition, but he was not so enthusiastic about responding to war, or being involved in strikes and labour struggles, and emphasised creating the new within the shell of the old. A lot of young Catholic working men went off to fight fascism in the US military - and, some might argue, created the largest fascist empire in world history. Other young Catholic workers went to prison as conscientious objectors. The war ended with the totalitarian experience of Hiroshima. At the beginning of the war aerial bombardment was labelled a Nazi war crime, but by the end of the war the Allies had perfected and refined it - in Dresden, Tokyo and finally Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Dorothy was one of the few people to come out within a week of the Hiroshima bombing condemning it. In the US the Catholic Worker was largely known for its direct work with the poor and its consistent stand on pacifism - which began in fact in the Spanish Civil War. It was arguable that the Catholic Worker and the actions of the Berrigans and others, had had an influence on the Catholic Church, out of all proportion to the numbers involved. Thus it would be hard to imagine a Catholic bishop today acting as Cardinal Spellman did when he went to Vietnam dressed in khaki holding a gun. The change was due, at least in part, to the Catholic Worker.

During the 1950s another person who had a major influence on the movement was Ammon Hennacy, an individualist, Christian anarchist. When he was imprisoned in World War I for draft resistance the authorities made the mistake of putting him in the same prison as Alexander Berkman, an anarchist and close friend of Emma Goldman who had tried unsuccessfully to assassinate an industrialist. Their other mistake was to restrict the reading material available to prisoners to the Bible. Between Berkman and the Bible, Hennacy emerged from prison a Christian anarchist. His extraordinary life is recounted in his autobiography *The One Man Revolution*. He worked in New York in the 1940s and 1950s with the Catholic Worker. He became a Catholic, though later thought better of it. He would carry out long fasts in a very personal response to situations. In New York city in the late fifties there were air raid drills in preparation for nuclear war. One year Ammon refused to take shelter and was arrested; the next year he was joined by several dozen others, and eventually the numbers grew to several thousand leading to the exercise being called off. So at least runs the popular account within the movement of what happened.

In the 1960s it was Catholic Worker people who were the first to publicly burn their draft cards. Now after 60 odd years there were several generations involved in the movement. Phil and Dan Berrigan were in their seventies and grew up with the Catholic Worker paper. The Berrigans helped the movement to shift from relatively passive conscientious objection to more active war resistance in response to the capital-intensive methods of modern warfare. The authorities no longer came for you or your children to the extent as they used to. What they really demanded of us in the First World was our silence as they prepared war in a more high-tech way and a more 'franchising' way - that is to say they franchised out the waging of war and the maintaining of their empire to client states. The Berrigans, influenced by grass-roots movements, including Martin Luther King's Civil Rights movement in the South, came into the anti-war movement and were advising young Catholics not only to conscientiously object but to draft resist. They came to the personal conclusion in 1968 that they could not conscientiously do this



without coming from a point of risk themselves. At Catonsville, with seven others, they went into a draft board, took draft cards and with homemade napalm burned them in the car-park in a kind of liturgical ceremony. Meconis tells the history of this development in his book *With Clumsy Grace*.

Their action led to scores of others across the US, mostly carried out by the Catholic Left at that point, but with different groups joining in and putting their own styles to it. Berrigan influenced those who remained on the site and claimed responsibility for the action. Others adopted a policy of 'hit and split'. Some would go underground and surface later. Both Phil and Dan after their trial went underground and were pursued by the FBI. Recently Ciaron had met a former FBI agent who had been with the agency for 21 years but refused an order on moral grounds in 1990 to carry out surveillance on a Catholic peace group and gave up his job when he was only 15 months away from retirement on a fat pension. Ciaron met him while the man was fasting on the steps of Congress. He told Ciaron that he and another agent had carried out surveillance on the Berrigan's mother when she was in hospital dying in the hope that the brothers would turn up so they could arrest them. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, was a Catholic who became obsessed with the Berrigans.

Liz McAllister, a radical imprisoned after the Harrisburg trial, married Phil Berrigan when she had served her sentence. Together they started Jonah House and began experimenting at the Pentagon and other sites and started the Ploughshares actions. In September 1980, eight of them - Dan, a Jesuit priest, Phil an excommunicated, married Josephite priest, Carl Kabat, an Oblate priest currently serving an 18 year sentence, Anne Montgomery, Molly Rush a mother of nine children, John Scucharadt, a lawyer, Elma Maas, a professor of music, and Dean Hamer, at that time a theology student - entered a General Electric facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and with household hammers carried out a disarmament action on components for the MX missile. They stayed and prayed and were arrested, and received sentences initially of three to ten years. They appealed, but Ciaron did not know the outcome of the appeal. Since then there had been around 56 actions of disarmament inspired by the prophecy of Isaiah. They saw these actions in the tradition of the Gospels and of the Church.

Returning to his own experience, Ciaron said the community he and others set up in Brisbane, held all things in common and made a living together. He added that not all Catholic Worker communities operated in that way. The two ministries they saw in the life of Christ and in the movement were the acts of mercy and the acts of resistance. In Los Angeles and New York, the communities ran large soup kitchens. Those who had been doing this since the late 60s said that early on they were mainly dealing with elderly white alcoholics at the end of their working lives, whereas now they dealt more with young addicts, black men who might be the second or third generation on welfare. It threw up a whole lot of questions for the movement about co-dependency, charity and so forth. Other houses did other things. There was a gay Catholic community in Syracuse doing good work with AIDs victims. The New York prison system actually sent them people in the last phase of AIDs to die with the community and host the person's family and friends in the house. In Sacramento the orientation was around an AID's hospice. In West Virginia there was a large penitentiary for women in the middle of nowhere to which a lot of the Ploughshares women had been sent. Catholic Worker had established a house there for families visiting prisoners. There was a house doing similar work in Wisconsin. In Washington DC, the house where Ciaron lived was specifically for homeless women and their children.

The point the Catholic Worker made was that since the Church became officially recognized in the 3rd century AD it had been continually affirmed by the state for its acts of mercy. So the flip side - the resistance - was very important and gave the acts of mercy some integrity. This too took different orientations. The communities in Houston and Atlanta focussed on resisting the death penalty. In Las Vegas, Nevada, it had played an important part in the large-scale civil disobedience there, and in Los Angeles the community had offered consistent resistance to the very high-tech corporations that dominate the economy in Southern California. The Washington DC community had plenty to choose from, amongst others, the Pentagon and the Department of Energy.

Ciaron then gave a more detailed account of the Ploughshare's action he was involved in the US in 1990-1991. He was in the US during the build-up to the Gulf War in 1990. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, there had been a considerable debate about the so-called 'peace dividend' and who would benefit from it. This internal debate was resolved with the search for a new enemy, and the re-casting of an old ally, Saddam Hussein as a new enemy. You had had a preview of this six months earlier with Noriega who graduated from the School of the Americas and was on the CIA payroll, yet overnight became the demonic Central American. According to one prisoner Ciaron met in jail, his arrest by US forces was the first time a head of state had been taken prisoner without a declaration of war since Cleopatra! It was extraordinary to be in the US while this empire mobilised for war. A few nights every week the Catholic Worker community in Washington DC would go out with their soup van and feed homeless people directly opposite the White House in Lafayette



Park. So on the one side you had the most powerful house in the world and on the other homeless people depending on Catholic Worker volunteers to feed them. They also carried out daily vigils at the White House and nonviolent direct action at the Pentagon.

They finally decided to carry out a Ploughshares action against a B52 Bomber. This followed a statement by General Dugan, then head of the US Airforce, that B52s were being armed in the island of Diego Garcia with Israeli missiles and that downtown Baghdad would be targeted. He was sacked for saying this, not because of the immorality of the policy but because he had made it public. They knew at that point that B52 bombers were going to be used extensively, and of course they knew of the way they had been used to wage a genocidal war in Indochina. So Ciaron and three others, Moana Kohl from New Zealand, Bill Streit, a former Catholic priest, and Sue Frankel whose paternal grandparent had died in Auschwitz, formed a disarmament community and prepared to take action. It was a thorough and exhausting preparation, primarily building a community that could disarm and that then could handle everything that would be thrown at it, whether it was the FBI and the government coming down, or parents freaking out, or community and peer-group pressure, and, in Bill's case, excommunication.

A Ploughshares retreat would generally begin on a Friday night with people sitting in a circle. Before they formed a 'community of intent' they would have others present exploring the ideas. They would check in with each other emotionally, then check in on security - whether there had been any leaks and whether anyone had been heard discussing a possible action. Previous experiences, particularly of FBI infiltration of groups, had made people in the movement very security conscious. Then they would check in on 'status' - whether people were still willing to act. At the weekend there would be the presentation of papers, for instance on the role of B52 bombers in Indochina, on Scripture, or on the history of the Ploughshares movement, including the mistakes it had made in the past. Throughout this period they were being carried through by a few people who had acted before. One woman dealt with the 'fatality issue' - that someone might be killed or wounded. Others had expertise in the area of law and how they should approach the trial.

Finally they went to disarm the B52 on Advent Sunday, the first Sunday in December. They got into the base with the help of Vietnam veterans, but then couldn't find the B52s; what they thought were B52s turned out to be planes that carried out re-fuelling. In the early hours, in heavy snow, and feeling immensely demoralised and depressed, they had had to withdraw. When they returned to their base they heard on the radio that another 300 bombers and fighters were being deployed in the Gulf.

A month later they returned, and this time were successful. Bill and Sue entered the base on one side and disarmed a B52 bomber, putting a crack in it so that - as they learnt during their trial - it went from being on a ten-minute alert status to not flying for two months. Mwana and Ciaron got into the base on the other side, poured blood on the runway, and spray-painted 'No More Bombing of Children in Vietnam, Hiroshima, the Middle-East or Anywhere Else' and began to take up the runway with a sledgehammer.

The three parts of the Ploughshares Action were the Action itself, the trial and the prison witness. Their approach to the trial was first to expose to the people arresting them and putting them on trial that they didn't believe in their own rhetoric - they didn't believe in the law and were acting illegally; and second to speak truth to power. At the pre trial hearing they argued that the US had signed international agreements outlawing weapons of mass destruction, that the B52s were such weapons, and that therefore the charge of destroying government property should be dropped. Like a stack of child pornography or heroin, this bomber had no status as property under law. However, their argument was not accepted and they were sent for trial.

In US law there is a defence of necessity where you have to prove four elements: an imminent threat to life; the absence of a legal alternative; some chance of success; proportionality.

The imminent threat to life was clearly present, and indeed by the time they came to trial it had become a reality. By then Harvard University were stating that several thousand Iraqi children under five had died as a result of the US bombardment of water and sewerage systems which had unleashed a plague of gastro-enteritis and cholera to which the very young and the very old were particularly vulnerable. Ramsey Clark, the former US Attorney General, also testified at the trial to the indiscriminate nature of B52 bombardment in Iraq where Mosques, hospitals, schools had all been bombed.

The absence of a legal alternative was also attested to by Ramsey Clark. He gave it as his opinion that no such alternative existed two weeks before the ultimatum to Iraq expired. As regards the prospects of success, the US Airforce witnesses themselves confirmed that the action had closed the runway for an hour during mobilisation for



war, and grounded a B52 bomber. Finally on the issue of proportionality, using household hammers in those circumstances to carry out an act of disarmament could hardly be regarded as disproportionate. So they argued that they had a necessity defence which they should be allowed to present to a jury. But the judge ruled out this defence. In effect, they were thus denied trial by jury.

An important objective during the trial was to bring the spirit of Ploughshares witness into the courtroom and into the city. So throughout the trial there were acts of civil disobedience going on back at the airforce base, and while they were on trial there were several hundred military resisters being court-martialled for their resistance to the Gulf War.

All four defendants were found guilty. The two women received a prison sentence of 6 months to 6 years. He was eventually sentenced to a year in prison and he spent most of his time as the only white person in a jail in Pecos, Texas. He was confined with 24 others in a cell produced by welding six cages together. Ninety-five per cent of the prisoners were Mexican, and it gave him an interesting experience of the Third World. He spent time also in seven other prisons, including a penitentiary in Louisiana. In the US the authorities respect the sanctity of property far more than the sanctity of human life, and on their release, the FBI returned their hammers and wire-clippers. They then mailed these to Chris Coles in England who used them to carry out a Ploughshares action against Hawk warplanes at British Aerospace.

NARP Discussion

Seeds of Hope Trial

Answering questions about the forthcoming trial of four 'Seeds of Hope' Ploughshares women in Liverpool, Ciaran said he had been working with a support group for the past month or so and had been doing a lot of community organising following the lines of the work they had done in Syracuse. The aim was to bring people into the drama of the trial, celebrating the disarmament that had occurred and putting the Hawk deal and the war in East Timor on trial. So they had organised lots of celebratory events as well as educational and activist ones.

Amongst those who would be giving evidence at the trial about the war in East Timor were John Pilger, the writer and journalist, and José Ramos Horta, one of the chairmen of East Timorese resistance. Of the two other chairmen, one was serving a 20 year prison sentence, the third was working underground in East Timor. José had written to the women saying that they had done something that the East Timorese resistance had not been able to achieve in 20 years, namely to ground one of these planes and to do so without loss of life. That dialogue between Ploughshares and a Third World Liberation movement could develop into something very interesting. Another witness would be Carmel Budiardjo, an Englishwoman who was the widow of an Indonesian who had spent 12 years in Suharto's jails. She herself had served three years in jail in Indonesia.

One of the events outside the courtroom would be a demonstration by a group of pensioners who survived the Blitz: their slogans would be 'No Aerial Bombardment - Not for Liverpool, Not for East Timor', and 'Stop the Hawk Deal'. The trial would start with a procession of supporters dressed in black who would assemble in the bombed-out ruins of St Lukes church, destroyed during the Blitz. The following week the sister of a journalist killed at the time of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor would be speaking. A group of Liverpool women on their way to Lourdes planned to walk to the shrine on the day the trial opened with banners in support of the women's action. Also a group of young people would be organising a rave in their support and an Irish Ceili band would be doing a concert for them. So instead of giving people another meeting to go to, they were organising events around what people would be doing in any case. It was an amazing coalition of old lefties, Irish Catholics, women's groups and others. The tolerance level was extraordinary.

Symbolism and actual disarmament

There was, Ciaran said, a debate within the movement about the relative importance of the actual effects as against their symbolic significance. Ploughshares operated at both levels, but he was convinced that the symbol was the more powerful element. During the Gulf War, for instance, when there was a huge orchestrated



propaganda barrage in favour of the war, one US marine stationed in Hawaii, Jeff Patterson, refused to board a troop carrier bound for the Gulf and sat down on the runway stating that the war had nothing to do with democracy or freedom or human beings but was about oil corporations and their control of the Third World's resources. The Marine Corps was freaked out, not because they were going to lose the services of one marine, but because of the symbolic significance of a member of the corps following his conscience and refusing orders.

In the case of the women on trial in Liverpool, they had done two and a half million pounds worth of disarmament to a plane that already had Indonesian markings on it, and the Indonesians were now saying they did not want that particular plane. Four Hawks were supposed to arrive in Indonesia this month, but only three turned up - so in terms of concrete effects this was an incredibly strong action. It was now up to people to 'run with it', and make use of the witness and the real sacrifice these women had made. Their action had proved a powerful tool in organising in Liverpool. These issues were often so abstract - East Timor, nuclear weapons. But the women had entered into the drama of East Timor and through them others could do the same.

He was concerned, nevertheless, that Ploughshares should not get stuck in self-referential rhetoric, whether feminist or Catholic or whatever. He would also be concerned about the possibility of some sections of Ploughshares movement becoming jaded by the apathy of the first World and saying to themselves that there were only so many hours in the day and it was really not worth putting those into community organising.

Lifestyle and sustainability

Bob said that presumably their ability to sustain their actions sprang from the constructive work they were doing alongside the resistance, in contrast to many direct actionists. Ciaron agreed. For him surviving the prison experience was due to two things: spirituality and solidarity. In terms of Catholic tradition he could interpret the year as a kind of monastic event. He could see that the institution was trying to reshape and reform him and get him to recant, and he had to build a discipline into the day that was his own discipline rather than that of the institution. He could interpret his presence in prison in terms of solidarity with the poor - and he was sure that people from other traditions could do this too. While in jail he also received 1,800 pieces of mail from different countries.

Ploughshares action against the Gulf War

Michael said the justification for the Ploughshares action was entirely clear in the case of the Hawks bound for Indonesia. But it was not so clear-cut in the case of the Gulf War. Saddam Hussein was a bloody tyrant who had invaded another member state of the United Nations, taken it over and carried out horrendous repression there. One could oppose the indiscriminate nature of the Gulf war but still recognize that there was a genuine dilemma about what should be done.

Ciaron said the comparison between Kuwait and East Timor was revealing. The massacre in Iraq was justified on the basis that a large country had invaded and taken over a small neighbouring state. But this was exactly what the US and the West had been funding in East Timor for the last twenty years. He doubted if the West waged war in the Gulf over any kind of principle. It was largely a weapons experiment, using all the stuff that they had been developing during the Cold War like the fuel-air explosive bombs. The two and a half months in the Gulf were a small part of the war the West had waged in the Middle East.

Peace movement activity during the second half of 1990 brought protesters onto the streets in far greater numbers than in the similar period during the Vietnam war. But the peace movement mobilised, as it often does, on the basis of self-interest and fear. Their slogan became - 'No more Vietnams! We don't want to die in the Middle East!' George Bush got up before he started the war and said he agreed with that: there would be no more Vietnams because they would not fight with one arm tied behind their back. But when the war started and he delivered not another Vietnam but the equivalent of seven Hiroshimas, people in the peace movement who had been on the streets felt very stupid. In Vietnam the casualty rate was one American for fifty Vietnamese, in the Gulf War it was one American dead to a thousand Arabs; moreover, half the American casualties were from 'friendly fire' or during the preparations for the war. The peace movement collapsed half-way through the war. It had called for resistance within the military and quite a few took this up. Interestingly more serious resistance came out of the military than from the US peace movement. Two hundred military people were court-martialled and went to jail for from six



months to six years. When they went to court, and to jail, the peace movement was hardly to be seen. There was no big solidarity movement for those resisters.

The other point to make was that the states which waged war on Iraq were the same ones that built up Saddam's military machine for the specific purpose of containing Iran. The West had also supported Iranian fascism during the period of the Shah and the CIA had help build SAVAK which systematically liquidated any liberal opposition

He had an anti-imperialist analysis of war. It was basically armed robbery on a huge scale. As a radical Christian who looked back to Christianity prior to Constantine, he did not believe it was the role of Christians to run capitalism, or to run nation-states. Christian ethics got totally turned on its head with Constantine, and had been pretty disastrous ever since. He viewed Christians as a prophetic minority in any society.

Size and Impact of the Ploughshares' and Catholic Worker Movement

Asked about the numbers involved in the Ploughshares movement around the world. Ciaron said it was hard to put numbers on it, but the preparations for the meetings and the follow-up events were involving many more people than in the earlier draft-board actions. There had been supporting actions in many countries including Sweden, Germany, Holland, and Russia. In the US, there was a strong Catholic Worker connection with support coming mainly from radical Christian groups; however, feminists, Jewish organisations, Buddhists, Episcopalians and others had also been involved. In Britain the tone was more secular. There was no bureaucracy in the Ploughshares movement. A community would come together and act. However, in the US there was a network that had been in existence for 30 years.

Christina asked about the impact of the Ploughshares movement on public opinion in the US. Both the US and its NATO allies were broadly democratic and their actions must therefore reflect to some extent the thinking of their citizens. Her impression was that though there was an activist tradition in the US, there was not a broader left wing at the level of political parties or social movements. She wondered whether there was any movement there, or whether it was really a matter of continuing witness.

Ciaron said he basically accepted Chomsky's analysis of US foreign policy - namely that the US was an incredibly brutal empire. Like the Athenian one, it looked civilised at the centre, but as you went to the outposts you saw just how brutal it was. The empire was also largely invisible. Few people even in the American peace movement recognized that there was an American empire. Usually they would only go as far as acknowledging that the US had unjust relations with other independent countries.

A popular analysis of Phil Berrigan's influence would be that he had been totally marginalised. Thirty years ago he made the front cover of Time magazine, today his name is hardly mentioned - though there was a question about him in Trivial Pursuit! But while Ciaron was in prison he found most people over 45 knew of 'Father Berrigan' and regarded him with respect, and it was hard to judge qualitative impact. You could say that popular peace movements like the Nuclear Freeze Movement came and went, whereas the Berrigans remained there, nourishing things. He added that there was very little class consciousness in the US. People didn't hate the rich in America, and so many poor people felt that their lucky break was just around the corner. The log-cabin to White House myth remained extremely powerful.

Risk of disempowering ordinary mortals

John said he was fascinated by Ciaron's account and full of admiration. He was also impressed by the detail that went into the preparation of the action by the four women awaiting trial. But at one point when Ciaron was talking he was thinking to himself that he might as well just give up. He could not do the things he had been talking about because of his personal circumstances, or his strength, or whatever. So at the same time as being inspired by Ciaron's talk, he had also felt to some degree disempowered.

Ciaron said that people often underestimated themselves. In 1987 he had met someone called Joe Gump in Chicago. He and his wife Jean had raised eleven children, and the year before, without informing him except for leaving a note on the table, she had taken off and done a Ploughshares action with a Catholic Worker group at a



missile site. He was completely shocked by this event. But three months later Ciaron read that Joe too had undertaken a Ploughshares action at the same missile base.

However, he was not saying it was all this or nothing. The great thing in Liverpool at present was that people were working in all sorts of different ways towards the same end.

Postscript: On 30 July 1996 the jury at Liverpool Crown Court found the four Ploughshare's 'Seeds of Hope' women, Lotta Kronlid, Andrea Needham, Joanna Wilson and Angie Zelter, not guilty on all counts.

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