

# Up Against the Bomb

**A**s friends watched from the safety of a nearby public road, Gail Beyer and Bonnie Urfer of Madison and two other peace activists spent an hour one recent Sunday afternoon in a Missouri grainfield on the lid of an underground silo that held a nuclear missile 100 times more destructive than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

They sang songs, hung banners that said "Not in Our Name" and "Farms, Not Arms," tied paper ribbons to the heavy silo lid to keep it symbolically shut—and waited for the Air Force to arrive.

Within minutes the gravel road leading up to the silo was clogged with an assortment of official vehicles, including an armored truck from which an airman clad in battle helmet and bulletproof jacket trained a machine gun on the four demonstrators.

The four were led from the enclosure, handcuffed and whisked away to a police station, where they were questioned at length by Air Force investigators. Late that night they were shackled together at the waist and ankles and driven in a U.S. marshal's van to jails near Kansas City.

Gail Beyer and two of the other prisoners—Kathy Kelly and Duane Bean, both of Chicago—were dropped off at the county jail in Harrisonville, Mo. There Gail and Kathy were herded into a small holding cell and told to disrobe. A guard sprayed them with disinfectant, then an overhead shower nozzle doused them with cold water. Shivering, the two women were ordered into an adjacent corridor, where they waited, naked, until someone threw them some jail clothes.

The next afternoon the four defendants stood before U.S. District Judge Elmo B. Hunter, silver-haired and grandfatherly, who had presided over two earlier trials of missile silo

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protesters. Flanking them at the prosecutor's table was U.S. Attorney Robert G. Ulrich—tall and slim, with a crisp, military bearing.

First came the case of Gail Beyer, computer programmer, mother of children ages 2 and 11, valedictorian of her high school class, and the first mother in history to graduate (with high honors) from Yale University. She had traveled to Missouri in mid-August to take part with about 150 others in a large-scale "peace planting" of flowers in 10 missile silos, then returned 10 days later for a second silo entry with Bonnie, Kathy and Duane.

The charges: two counts of illegally entering federal property, each carrying a maximum possible penalty of six months in jail and a \$5,000 fine, and two counts of "degradation of government property," with a maximum possible penalty of one year in jail and a \$100,000 fine. What Gail and the others had "degraded," with a bolt cutter, was a \$2 padlock that secured the gate of the silo fence.

And so it went with the charges against the other three: Bonnie Urfer, who had entered three silos—five counts, three years in prison, \$215,125 in fines; Kathy Kelly and Duane Bean—eight counts each, five years and \$420,200.

The price of struggling for peace and justice can be high when it takes the form of challenging the authority of the state. In the case of the two Madisonians and five other Mid-

westerners who now face trial and almost certain conviction for challenging nuclear missiles in Missouri, the price will be high indeed: probably years behind bars unless they promise to refrain from such acts in the future.

So why take such risks? There are several reasons—and one of them is apparent in Missouri today. As one of the seven Midwestern and Great Plains states where 1,000 nuclear missile silos are deployed, Missouri has in recent years become increasingly aware of the 150 silos covering one-sixth of the area of that state.

Four years ago Helen Woodson and Carl Kabat of Madison and two other peace activists broke Missouri's missile-silo mental blackout by damaging a silo lid with a jackhammer. The high price they paid for that act (prison terms of 12 to 18 years) has brought steadily growing interest and support.

Today the number of people directly challenging the laws that protect nuclear missile silos has risen from the scores into the hundreds. The risks willingly undertaken by Gail Beyer and Bonnie Urfer and others—like the risks taken in an earlier time by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.—are an essential part of a nonviolent revolutionary process.

If you want to know more about the nonviolent revolution under way in the missile silo fields of the United States (and if you'll pardon this self-serving plug), read the book *Nuclear Heartland*, recently published in Madison by Nukewatch. A book-signing party will be held Friday, Sept. 16, at People's Bookstore, 458 W. Gilman St., from 4 to 6 p.m. Bonnie and Gail, awaiting trial, will be on hand. ■

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