



T. RINGLER, CURRICULUM COVER FOR EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY'S "CONCEPTS OF PEACE"

THE AMERICAN PEACE TEST

by Debora Seymour

Just six hours from Ground Zero it seemed that eight hours of nonviolence training barely prepared us for the experience ahead. It was a long twenty-five hour drive from the north Oregon coast to the Nevada Test Site, sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas. The reality of entering the federal test area was just beginning to take hold of my psyche. Roger Waters' radio KOAS lyrics seemed to heighten my reflective spirit as we cruised the northern Nevada highway that night.

1988 marks the thirty-seventh year of military testing at the nation's only nuclear weapons testing facility, the Nevada Test Site. The tests are carried out to determine blast and radiation effects on military hardware, to gauge the reliability of existing military hardware and to test newly designed weapons. The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Defense (DOD), as well as Livermore and Los Alamos research laboratories conduct the tests.

A ban on nuclear tests has been a focal point of peace movement efforts. Such a ban would stop the development on new generations of nuclear weapons and decrease confidence in the reliability of existing weapons stockpiles to the point where launching a first strike could not be considered. A comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union would be an important first step towards a comprehensive nuclear freeze. This year's March 11th through 20th action to Reclaim the Test Site would be an important step in an ongoing grassroots citizens movement of direct nonviolent civil resistance to the continued threat of nuclear proliferation.

We arrived at the peace camp the following afternoon. As a colorful representation of the creative human spirit the Nevada desert was highlighted with people from all over the country. Flags, banners and bumper stickers reflected our common convergence, "The American Peace Test."

The concept for "The American Peace Test" originated in 1985 when several members of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign Direct Action Taskforce participated in "August Direct Witness," a four day civil resistance action at the Nevada Test Site. Inspired and empowered, they organized a month long presence at the test site urging the U.S. to join the unilateral Soviet testing moratorium which began August 1, 1985. More than five hundred people from twenty-eight states made the journey to the test site and participated in daily demonstrations during the month prior to the November summit. One hundred and thirteen of them were arrested for trespassing.

In January 1986 "The American Peace Test" was officially organized to continue this campaign. Since then literally thousands of people have come to the test site to join in the ongoing campaign to stop nuclear testing. Many of these people have been arrested. On February 5 and May 10 (Mother's Day) of last year two thousand and three thousand people respectively attended demonstrations at the test site.

This year's "March Action to Reclaim the Test Site" was the latest in this nonviolent campaign of civil resistance. Unlike past actions this was the first to employ daily civil resistance using different scenarios for ten days.

As nightfall came the desert sky grew radiant. People continued to arrive, with registration as the main stream. Peace camp orientation followed while affinity groups came together for planning this year's first massive civil resistance the following day. I looked out across the highway from the peace camp toward the test site area. Three miles from the cattle guard entrance onto the test site a small almost mysterious company town called Mercury is lighted by high-pressure sodium lights. Some test site employees actually live there around the clock. There was talk of tomorrow's action being "Destination Mercury."

Camp came alive early Saturday morning with nighttime arrivals seeking affinity in preparation for the day's action. It seemed that Oregon had one of the largest representations as they gathered on a hilltop overlooking the camp. A group called Seeds for Peace was busy with breakfast preparations, offering

three vegetarian meals a day for the small cost of one dollar a day.

The main rally began with the arrival of relay runners, including a wheelchair runner from Las Vegas, with a torch lit from the eternal flame at the Hiroshima Memorial in Japan. The rally was interesting and alive, featuring several prominent speakers and entertainers. Cesar Chavez, Daniel Ellsberg, William Sloane Coffin and Holly Near were among them. Most of my time at the rally was spent helping to issue Shoshone Indian Permits, which allowed demonstrators to be on the test site land.

According to the Treaty of Ruby Valley between the Shoshone and the U.S. government written in 1863, the Shoshone still hold title to the proposed Great Basin Site. This area covers forty-three thousand square miles which also encompass the Nevada Test Site boundaries. No treaty, accord, agreement, vote or sale exists that gives the U.S. permission to explode nuclear bombs or devices on or under the Western Shoshone Nation. The U.S. has offered twenty-six million dollars (about a dollar and a half per acre) to "extinguish" Western Shoshone title to the territory covered by the treaty. The strategy in issuing permits was to use arrests for trespassing as a means of demonstrating that the U.S. cannot accuse someone of trespassing on land it does not own. The government of the Western Shoshone Nation wants to show that it is the U.S. that is trespassing.

As the rally came to a close nearly all four thousand people in attendance crossed the highway via a culvert and lined up along a barbed wire fence posted with federal no trespassing signs. I was with my affinity group, Sacajawea's Voice. In calm we waited for the signal to cross the fence if we chose to participate in civil resistance and risk the consequence.

Standing on the test site side of the fence were camouflage uniformed military personnel and Nye County sheriffs. They seemed fearless as they all stood identically in a true military pose. My heart was beating somewhere between fear because they were all

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