

Legal Update on Vandenberg Protestors

Here's what happened -- on October 7, 2000, twenty two of us were arrested at Vandenberg Airforce Base in a peaceful protest. We were there because Vandenberg is where they are testing the National Missile Defense system -- or Star Wars Revisited. Supposedly, it is meant to counteract warheads arriving towards us, but in reality, it opens the door to research and testing for a whole new generation of weapons, including 'usable' small scale nukes designed to support a ground war (don't ask me how!) and space based weapons. The Death Star made real.

Aside from my longstanding aversion to being blown up in a nuclear war, my disgust at the utter waste of resources this program represents, and my objections to starting up a new arms race, I see this program as Clinton's and now Bush's attempt to provide the muscle behind U.S. global economic domination. Just in case the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the general level of corporate dominance fail to whip those other countries into shape, we'll have a brand new nuclear arsenal to deploy should anyone out there get uppity.

In spite of the fact that our protest was utterly peaceful, nonviolent, and fairly small, we were met with an incredible show of military force, complete with dogs, clubs, and the chance to be personally interrogated. The military police at one point ordered everyone to disperse, and then immediately arrested our entire legal team, among others. One of the arrestees was actor Martin Sheen, and we were treated well once they had us in custody. One woman was charged with Battery on an officer (for no obvious reason--I was next to her the whole time and she did nothing of the sort). The rest of us were charged with misdemeanor trespassing -- carrying the maximum penalty of six months in jail, along with potential fines and probation.

In late June, after eight months of no communication from the government, we were suddenly ordered to appear in Federal Court in Los Angeles to be arraigned. Martin Sheen pleaded guilty. The Federal Prosecutor had been asking for an \$80 fine and three years Federal Probation. The Judge gave him a \$500 fine and three years probation. All the rest of us pleaded not guilty, and our trial is set for December 6.

Three years probation is a very long time for a very minor offense, and is clearly aimed at suppressing dissent. It's part of a larger picture of stiff sentences handed out to nonviolent demonstrators at the School of the Americas and at Vieques. The only way to counter a crackdown of this sort is to not be intimidated and carry on with increased activism. Yes, that can

carry a price, but not nearly as steep a price as doing nothing, and allowing these programs to be implemented.

Thirty two other activists arrested May 19 and 20 were arraigned earlier this month, and many will also be going to trial. We'll be asking for your political, spiritual, and magical support--and maybe also for financial support to offset fines and legal costs. More on that later.

-- *Starhawk*

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