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Faslane Peace Camp and the Political Economy of the Everyday
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In what ways is ‘the everyday’ reproduced and reconfigured at protest camps? I pursue this question in my current research project, in which protest camps are defined as a ‘place-based social movement strategy that involves both acts of ongoing protest and acts of social reproduction needed to sustain everyday life’ (Feigenbaum et al. 2013: 12). My interest in the domestic arrangements of camps is common among observers, appearing prurient and disproportionate to those living them. As one interviewee from Faslane Peace Camp put it, “I am actually here to try and stop the end of the world ... and all you want to talk about is the bloody toilets!” (A, 22/10/2014). Nonetheless, buttressed by a feminist curiosity about the interconnections between the personal and political, I cling to the view that the reconfiguration of the everyday in protest camps is intrinsic rather than irrelevant to their political effect. In this short piece, I examine how daily life at Faslane Peace Camp depends upon and fosters the critical interrogation of economic norms.

‘The longest running peace camp in the world’ was established back in 1982 (Faslane Peace Camp 2013). It is shoehorned into a wooded verge of the A814 road, about 30 miles from my hometown of Glasgow and just a few hundred yards from the naval base which sprawls on the other side of the road down to the waters of Gare Loch, and which houses the British Trident nuclear submarine fleet. Numbers at the camp have varied over the years: there may have been as many as 40 at times in the 80s, while nowadays the total seems to hover around half a dozen. Today ‘[t]here’s a bathroom with hot and cold water, flush and compost toilets, gas and wood-fired cooking facilities, solar power, and telephone and internet’ (Faslane Peace Camp 2015). The site remains crammed with caravans and structures decorated in vibrant colours and interspersed with lush planting, its very presence a counterpoint to the austere base over the road and a reminder of the persistence of opposition to nuclear weapons.

On my reading, Faslane Peace Camp is an intriguing site of feminist politics. In contrast to the women-only peace camps of the 1980s, which provided a vehicle for a feminist peace politics in which participants sought to disrupt the gender order in parallel with their efforts to dismantle the nuclear state (Krasniewicz 1992; Roseneil 1995), Faslane Peace Camp has always been a mixed gender space, and campers have not consistently articulated a feminist collective identity (with anarchism predominant in that regard). Feminism has been influential at several points, however, with diverse individual and collective feminist identities articulated - and contested - in the camp over the years.

Certainly, feminist ideas and practices have, along with anarchism, informed the camp struggle to reconfigure daily life. Campers live to a large degree in public view, thus ensuring the visibility of processes of social reproduction usually hidden away in homes. Moreover, campers have sought to collectivise domestic processes that are more often the responsibility of individual women. Thus they have tended to eat their evening meal together around the campfire or in communal structures, frequently sharing this food with visitors. Preparation and cleaning-up has been organised either by rota or on a voluntary basis, largely irrespective of gender, as has the crucial task of collecting wood. In addition, childcare has been shared by men and women beyond the immediate family. As one camper commented: ‘people would say, “how on earth can you manage to bring up a baby at the peace camp?” ... well, it’s a

mystery to me how women on their own manage to bring up a baby in a high-rise flat without any support. It's easy [at the camp] because there's always somebody around' (A, 22/10/2014). I suggest that this socialisation of child care and domestic work – however incomplete it may be – has been key to the full participation of women in direct actions against the nearby base and integral to the challenge posed by the camp to the norms of the nuclear state.

It is also intimately connected to a critique of capitalist economic norms. Most obviously, campers reject the institution of waged labour. In the early days of the camp, 'we were all unemployed so we all had giros, and the way it worked was everybody... had different signing-on days [and]... we just handed over the money. And people kept a certain amount for themselves and we ... would just have a wee kitty and people could take money out of it' (N, 27/11/14). One interviewee justified this practice to me: 'there's a lot of people paid actually a lot more than that to work for war ... working for peace should be covered and it isn't, so I felt in some ways that I was taking the government's money to campaign against its own folly, and that was fair enough' (A, 22/10/14). The reliance on state benefit appears to have ended in recent years: 'when I moved there [in 2011] ... we decided that we weren't going to take any benefits and that we would try to live without money where possible ... everyone contributed £5 a week [from savings and]... we "skipped" most of our food' (F, 25/10/14). Whatever the specifics, it seems to me that campers have, in effect, rejected the dominant dichotomy between the masculine-dominated world of productive, waged work and the feminised sphere of reproductive labour, organising themselves instead around interconnected spheres of peace work and camp life.

This goes hand-in-hand with other alternative economic practices: living 'minimally', using renewable energy sources, and sharing possessions to some degree. Such practices are not simply a result of the exigencies of living at the camp, but reflect a wider critique of the capitalist economy as alienating, exploitative and unsustainable – as a significant part of the problem of which nuclear weapons are one symptom: 'People go to their jobs and then they go to the gym for their exercise whereas we ... encompass everything... [T]hey haven't got enough money, they're forced to do a zero-hour contract job ... [they're] on Prozac... all your problems are caused by this structure, this system that you're in' (D, 23/10/14). Or as another camper testified, 'I'd been in a job that paid quite a lot of money, I had ... my own house ... car, stereos and all this stuff, and here we were sitting at the side of the road in a caravan, we'd none of that and ... our life ... was richer' (N, 27/11/14).

The camp does not exist in a vacuum and larger political and economic dynamics have both enabled and constrained this fusion of alternative economics with anti-nuclear activism. Participants from the 1980s recognise that the benefit regime at that time facilitated the abandonment of waged labour for peace work, while current campers indicate that austerity politics, along with changing priorities in social movement circles, make it harder and harder to keep the camp going. Certainly, the radical restructuring of daily life at Faslane Peace Camp is very difficult to replicate more widely and places structural limitations on who is able to participate. Nonetheless, the camp serves as a reminder of the fact that political transformation on even ostensibly non-economic issues is intimately connected to everyday economic relations, as well as of how 'trying to live a non-violent lifestyle' (N, 27/11/14) challenges not only the moral codes of wider society but also dominant framings of the economy.

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