

84-year-old nun sentenced to prison for “sabotaging” US preparations for war

By Gabriel Black
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An 84-year-old nun and two of her compatriots were sentenced to prison time for breaking into a nuclear weapons plant and covering parts of the facility with biblical phrases and human blood.

Sister Megan Rice was given a 35-month prison sentence. Michael Walli, 64, and Greg Boertje-Obed, 58, were both sentenced to 62 months in prison. These sentences are in addition to the nine months they have already spent in jail.

The three could have faced sentences of up to 30 years for sabotage and damaging federal property.

The major felony they were convicted of was violation of the Federal Sabotage Act of 1918. This act, passed during World War I, prohibits “the destruction of war material” and “the obstruction of war preparation.” The implication of this is that the nuclear weapons production facility is an instrument in the preparation for war and is designed for future use.

The prosecutor, Assistant US Attorney Jeffery Theodore, called for a six-to-nine year sentence. Theodore argued that the trio had conducted sabotage in line with the Act of 1918 and urged the court to recognize that their wrongdoings were “serious offenses that have caused real harm to the Y-12 National Security Complex.”

The Y-12 National Security Complex is, according to its web site, “a premier manufacturing facility dedicated to making our nation and the world a safer place... [playing] a vital role in the Department of Energy’s Nuclear Security Enterprise.” The plant was started in the 1940s as a key site for the Manhattan Project, the military scientific project that led to the creation of the first atomic bomb.

The trio broke into the complex on July 28, 2012. They cut through three separate fences and gained access to the most secure part of the facility, a \$548

million dollar uranium storage bunker.

The protesters spent more than two hours inside. According to the *Guardian* newspaper, “they hung banners, strung up crime-scene tape and hammered off a small chunk of the fortress-like storage facility.” The group had filled up baby bottles with human blood and poured them on the sides of the wall. Biblical verses were spray-painted, such as “the fruit of justice is peace.”

The 84-year-old Rice said that she was “stunned” that she got so far into the facility and encountered no resistance for hours. She also expressed disbelief that the entire plant complex was shut down in response to the group.

When security guards arrived, the three protesters were singing. They offered white roses, candles, bread, and a bible to the security dispatch.

The Union of Concerned Scientists and certain government officials asked that the activists’ sentences be reduced because they had exposed holes in the security system of a site that is supposed to be one of the most secure in the world.

US District Judge Amul Thapar told the court before handing out sentences that “at some point, the law has to command respect, and there is a lawful way to change it.” The judge expressed the hope that prison would cause the defendants to reconsider their actions and bring them “back to the political system I fear that they have given up on.”

Sister Rice demanded no leniency for her actions and said, at the age of 84, that it would be an “honor” to spend the rest of her life in prison. US Attorney Theodore told the court that Rice and her cohorts were “recidivists and habitual offenders,” and that he was perturbed by the fact they “pretty much celebrated their acts.”

The United States possesses roughly 7,700 nuclear warheads, about 45 percent of the world's known total of 17,300. A site, nukemap, shows the effect a nuclear weapon could have if it were detonated over a major metropolitan area.

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