

2 nuclear protesters pick special day for jail

2 nuclear protesters pick a special day to go to jail

By Gloria Negri
Globe Staff

Symbolically choosing to begin their incarceration on the observance of Martin Luther King's birthday, two Massachusetts women will enter the Tonopah, Nev., jail at noon tomorrow to serve sentences for taking part in a nonviolent demonstration at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site in 1984.

Dr. Margaret Brenman-Gibson of Stockbridge, clinical professor of psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard University, and Sally Mack of Brookline, a social worker at Children's Hospital in Boston, expect to serve five or more days in jail. They were allowed to select when they would serve.

They were among 149 persons arrested at the test site, near Beatty, Nev., early in June 1984 for trespassing on US government property by joining hands and crossing the test-site boundary, knowing they would be arrested for doing so.

Some 600 others, from all walks of life, took part in a rally and civil disobe-

dience action organized by the American Peace Test, a national antinuclear group, which espouses nonviolence and civil disobedience as a way to end the arms race.

Mack was arrested with her husband, Dr. John E. Mack, a Harvard Medical School faculty member, and their three sons. One son, Kenneth, 25, served his jail sentence with about 50 other demonstrators immediately after their arrest.

It was his courage to do so, his mother said in a recent telephone interview, that helped her decide to go to jail rather than to pay the \$150 fine.

"By serving his six-day stint, he felt he helped make the point more dramatically that the mounting threat of a nuclear holocaust has reached a critical danger point," Mack said. She said her husband paid his fine, "because he felt this was not the time for him to go to jail."

Brenman-Gibson, the wife of playwright William Gibson, who wrote "The Miracle Worker," "Two for the Seesaw" and "Golda," has been arrested four

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times for taking part in antinuclear acts of civil disobedience.

In a telephone interview from Las Vegas, where she is attending a conference of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Brenman-Gibson, who is in her 60s, said she would have to both pay a fine and serve a sentence because it was not her first arrest in the same Nevada county.

Mack, 54, said she chose to work out her \$150 fine at the rate of \$25 a day, by going to jail, "because I really felt this was not the time to pay the fine. I felt I could not handle it with money, that I had to go there and declare. The action we initiated was really about the continuation of humanity and it seemed as if there was nothing as important as making that point," she said.

Brenman-Gibson was first arrested in 1983 when, with 20 other antinuclear activists, she sat down in the doorway of a New York City building to disrupt business at Sperry Corp., which provides the government with electronic-based defense equipment.

Several months later, arguing on her own behalf in New York State Supreme Court, Brenman-Gibson contended that nonviolent civil disobedience is a far lesser evil than the nuclear war she said Sperry and other firms were preparing for. The charges against her were dismissed.

She was arrested again Aug. 6, 1985, the 40th anniversary of the day an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. "There was nothing I could do that seemed more logical than to be resisting further tests at the test site in Nevada," she recalled. She was arrested at the test site - in a town named Mercury - and served two days in the Nye County Jail in Beatty.

Because that was her first arrest in Nye County, she had the choice of paying a \$150 fine or going to jail, and she chose the latter.

Brenman-Gibson's third arrest for nonviolent civil disobedience came when she and others were blocking the passage of trucks arriving and leaving the Department of Energy in Washington. She served one day in a Washington jail.

Neither Mack nor Brenman-

Gibson relish the idea of serving time in jail. But, Brenman-Gibson explained, "We choose to go in the same American tradition in which Thoreau went to jail, and in the Gandhian tradition. In Thoreau's words, 'If you are resisting evil, cast your vote not with a piece of paper merely, but with your whole body.'"

Both women said they had the support of their husbands and their grown children in their decision to go to jail. A play William Gibson wrote a few years ago was about a nun who committed civil disobedience against nuclear armament.

"We're not looking forward to going to jail," Brenman-Gibson said, "because, in my experience, it is one of the most dreadful feelings in the world to be deprived of one's freedom. But, it is precisely in the interest of preserving the world peace and freedom that we are doing this."

Mack said of her impending incarceration: "Of course, I'm scared. I have no idea what will happen... the isolation... the violence or anger from other inmates."

"I was so impressed by my own reaction on going to the Nevada Test Site. I had for years hidden out from the responsibility I knew was mine and that visit became an indelible part of me. It was what our whole existence was about."

"There is something about a physical involvement with your family or people you care about that helps," Mack said. "You see this beautiful desert and then you realize what is going on there and that there is nothing more important than what you have to do."

Brenman-Gibson said her visit to Nevada in the past week has not been without its irony.

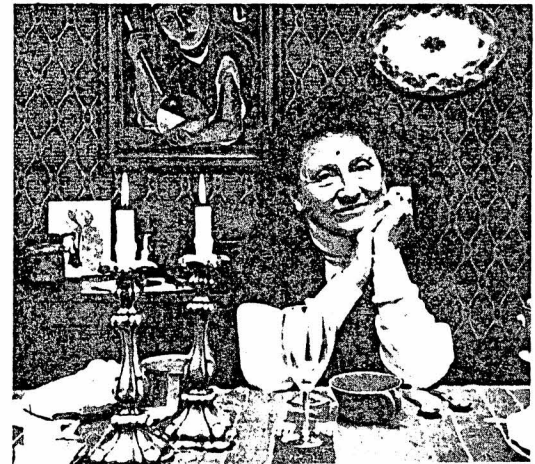
She is a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility; the US Department of Energy is taking the physicians on a guided tour of the entire nuclear test site, "not only above ground but also in the underground tunnels where the tests are conducted," Brenman-Gibson said.

"This," she said, "is the very site where I was arrested."

After serving her time in the Tonopah jail, Brenman-Gibson said she will travel to Washington to participate in a nationwide fast and prayer vigil to attempt to dissuade Congress from appropriating funds for the Nicaraguan contras.



Globe staff photo/Bill Greene
Sally Mack, a foe of nuclear weapons, stands in her Brookline kitchen.



Margaret Brenman-Gibson, a professor of psychology at Harvard, expects to serve five or more days in jail.

With S. Brian Willson, the 46-year-old antiwar demonstrator who lost his legs when he was run over by a train outside the Naval Weapons Station in Concord, Calif. last September, Brenman-Gibson is vice-president of a new group called Association for Responsible Dissent.

Willson had knelt on the tracks, he said, to stop shipment of arms to Central America. "It's important," Brenman-Gibson said in explaining why she would take part in the vigil, "that the American people know how our aid is fueling the war in Nicaragua."