

The Nixon Pickets Who Never Quit

WASHINGTON — (NWS)

One of the favorite tour-sights in the capital is the White House, particularly as seen from Pennsylvania Avenue in all its pristine splendor.

But for the past eight months, an incongruous scene has been intruding on the postcard-perfect view of the Executive Mansion. To some passers-by, it is an eyesore, to some a comic sight, to some a democratic symbol.

Since last June 2, a band of bedraggled demonstrators, calling themselves the White House Vigil for Peace, have been living in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in fair weather and foul.

Stand Around

During the day, they stand around, chat with pedestrians and pass out peace literature. Some lean against the White House fence and knit or work with leather. Others read newspapers or listen to radios. Some quietly puff away on a weed that smells suspiciously like marijuana.

When darkness falls, those few who plan to spend the night unroll their sleeping bags — aware that they are violating a law against camping without a permit and fully expecting to be awakened periodically by prods from the U.S. Park Police. The police, though, generally treat them kindly, largely because the demon-

strators have been completely peaceful.

The demonstration was organized by a group of New York Quakers supporting some colleagues who had been arrested for demonstrating against the war last April. At the time, they said they intended to stay for an indefinite period of time — until the war in Vietnam ended or a spirit moved them to leave.

Most of the Quakers left at the end of the summer but by then their ranks had been swollen by a variety of newcomers.

Passers-by generally react to them with a mixture of amusement and disgust. Some stop to chat or to read the various posters and signs propped against the fence. One is purported to be the will of a Vietnamese father to his son. "I leave you the foggy future," it says. "Foxholes to inhabit . . . booby-trapped paths to walk, rivers diluted with blood . . . nights of flash-bombs, days of napalm. May you leave your son a better one."

Though some of the demonstrators leave periodically to take part-time jobs, most of the support for the vigil comes from donations. Now and then a pedestrian will offer money and some Quaker groups have sent checks for as much as \$450.

Every night at 10:30, a Georgetown organic-food restaurant called Yes sends

its leftovers down to the demonstrators. Others have brought boxes of sandwiches.

Start Fights

Though there has been virtually no harassment from the police (one off-duty Park policeman even joined the group one night), the vigil has been badgered by hardships both natural and unnatural. On Thanksgiving night, one young girl collapsed from exposure.

A few eccentrics have started fistfights and one mentally disturbed woman attacked a young girl in the vigil. For a while, a few members of the American Nazi Party used to show up every third night or so to taunt the group.

Still, the spirit of the demonstrators remains high. "There is a higher potential here for spiritual growth than anywhere I've seen," says one demonstrator, a 28-year-old former schoolteacher. "It's a witness to peace and a celebration of life, a contest between the life forces and the death forces."

So far, the White House has adopted a policy of benign neglect toward the demonstrators. A "Dear Friend" letter sent to President Nixon, who is a Quaker, was not answered.

And the group has had at least one conversation with a member of the White House staff—Pat Buchanan.



PICKETS RELAX OUTSIDE WHITE HOUSE

Officially, Nixon hasn't seen them

a speechwriter, who stopped by one day to talk for a while.

Whether or not the vigil is making any impression on the President is another matter. But John Baer, one of the few remaining Quak-

ers in the demonstration, is happy in the knowledge that the President is aware of their presence.

"Officially," says Baer, "he doesn't know we're out here. Unofficially, he has waved to us four times."