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LADY OLGA WAGES WAR AGAINST THE PEACENIKS

It would be nice if we lived in an age when reason and rational discourse guided political discourse. Since we seem to live in a time when demonstrations and media events rank highest in the pecking order of power (when you want something, you take to the streets and demonstrate), I'm glad there is a Lady Olga.

Demonstrations against the deployment of U.S. cruise missiles and Pershing IIs in Britain and Europe have received extravagant news coverage. The crowds are impressive if you look at them in isolation, but the figures are not impressive at all if you compare them with the 1983 election figures.

In nationwide elections in which nuclear weapons were a major issue, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was reelected with a stunning overall majority of 144 seats, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl was reelected with a decisive victory margin of 21 seats.

When 12,000 British women linked their arms like a human fence last Easter and surrounded the perimeter of Greenham Common Air Base in order to demand disarmament now, one reporter was fascinated. For two soggy, cold days, she talked to the demonstrating women, came to the conclusion that they had been the victims of a "campaign of misinformation, emotionalism, manipulation and propaganda," and decided to respond to their media challenge.

"We are well aware that the women of this country are genuinely anxious about the nuclear debate," she said. "Our belief is that our families' future is best safeguarded by a strong defense policy."

And so, Lady Olga Maitland, a newspaperwoman, a mother of three children, the wife of a barrister, and the eldest daughter of the Earl of Lauderdale (a former member of Parliament), launched Women for Defence. She set out to lead a group of women -- mostly housewives -- to demonstrate for defense in order to counteract the overpublicized ban-the-bomb agitators.

For example, she gathered many thousands of pro-defense signatures and presented them

at the Russian embassy in London. The Russians greeted her with something less than enthusiasm, but she made her point.

The Women for Defence argument is simple and straightforward. Defense is better than no defense. The best way to safeguard our families' future is to continue to have a full defense system. No one wants nuclear war, but nukes cannot be disinvented, and (in the inimitable British understatement) "the world contains some very nasty people."

Lady Olga's movement is campaigning in favor of deployment of U.S. cruise missiles in Britain in the event no agreement is reached with the Soviet Union in Geneva for dismantling their SS-20s. "And when the Trident finally comes," she tells her audiences, "It is something you should all be jolly grateful for."

There is no question about what Lady Olga is reacting to: the British and European freezeniks, with their peace symbols and street marches, who preach unilateral disarmament. "They advocate that we lay down our arms and allow our freedoms to be totally walked over and live under a totally different regime."

She reminds her audiences repeatedly that nuclear weapons have kept the peace for 38 years, and that the alternative to nuclear deterrence is peace under Russian totalitarianism. She enthusiastically supports the pro-defense policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

Lady Olga has discovered that the freezeniks and the pacifists in Britain are not just starry-eyed idealists, but have very practical political motives as well as crude tactics that would be intimidating to most women. When she speaks at gatherings of the Labor Party or the Liberal Party, she is the target of increasing hostility and open ugliness in the form of booing and shouting and stamping of feet. At one Labor Party meeting, someone drenched her with a jug of water.

Lady Olga is now planning sister chapters in all 15 NATO countries and in the United States. On a recent visit to Washington, D.C., Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Tower hosted a news conference for her. She had impressed him with her skill in an international debate at Oxford last summer, and she likewise impressed other Americans who met with her in this country.