

Nuremberg Actions

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NUREMBERG ACTIONS--A BRIEF HISTORY

Nuremberg Actions marked its first day of existence on June 10, 1987, the first day of the ongoing vigil at the Concord Naval Weapons Station (CNWS) in Concord, California. It arose out of the concern of Brian Willson (Veterans Peace Action Team), David Hartsough (American Friends Service Committee), Ken Butigan (Pledge of Resistance), Bob Lasalle (Franciscan Affinity Group) and others to find a concrete way to demonstrate to the American people the horrors of what our country is doing in Central America.

The CNWS ships many of the armaments that are used in Central America. Most of these arms are carried on trains and trucks across a public road (Port Chicago Highway) to the docks on the Suisun Bay on the north side of the CNWS. The public road provides an ideal location for our Actions.

Because of Brian's legal background and interest in the Nuremberg Principles (NP) in particular, the use of international law as a way to frame the concerns about the actions of our country in Central America was adopted. The NP define international crimes (Crimes Against Peace, Crimes Against Humanity, and War Crimes) and the moral responsibility of government officials, military personnel, and individual citizens to disobey orders violating these Principles.

All those involved also share a commitment to nonviolence as the means of the Nuremberg Actions (NA). Historically, one of the main tactics of nonviolent movements is Civil Disobedience (CD). Given that the goal of NA is to uphold the law, actions such as blocking trains and trucks carrying weapons that will be used illegally are understood as Civil Obedience (CO)--obedience to a higher law. A "Nonviolence Covenant" was drafted which serves as the guide for all actions engaged in by NA participants.

During the Spring it was decided that an ongoing vigil, timed to start with a demonstration already planned by the Pledge of Resistance (POR), would be the core of the Actions. From June 10 to August 31 the 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. vigil was maintained by a small core that was Nuremberg Actions. From June 11-14, during the POR demonstrations, nearly 400 people were arrested trying to enter the CNWS or attempting to block trucks carrying munitions. During the rest of the summer there was virtually no blocking action. The focus remained on the vigil and on carefully logging the movement of trains and trucks.

During this time Brian and several others decided to begin a 40-day water only fast on September 1, the anniversary of the 1986 Veterans Fast for Life in which Brian had participated. In addition to fasting Brian decided to increase the resistance to the illegal arms shipments by blocking the trains that crossed Port Chicago Highway by placing his body on the tracks on which trains carrying their death cargo were coming. On August 21 he sent a letter to the Commander of the base specifying the planned blocking action, the reasons for it, and requesting a meeting with the Commander. This letter was followed by three phone calls which again requested a meeting, but to no avail. On August 28 the local paper carried an article detailing the planned fast and blocking action.

On September 1 a munitions train ran over Brian Willson causing the loss of both legs, a severe head injury, and other significant body trauma. Miraculously Brian not only survived, but did not suffer brain damage. He continues to grow in strength and spirit despite this attempted murder which resulted in the loss of both legs below the knees.

People all over the world have been moved by Brian's sacrifice to search their own hearts to discover what they must do to change U.S. policies and actions in Central America. Because of the immense national and international concern over what happened to Brian NA experienced an explosion of growth. Over the months since September 1 thousands of people have come to the tracks to vigil and to block the death trains and trucks. Every train and many of the trucks crossing the Port Chicago Highway must contend with groups of people trained in nonviolence determined not to let them pass.

An unexpected and very hopeful development in NA has been the emergence of a community of people totally committed to sustained nonviolent resistance where it was once thought that only an organization would stand. This community is striving to work together in the spirit of loving nonviolence. It is also seeking to discern how it might most effectively share its experiences and the NA model with other communities around the country.

Nuremberg Actions is very much an "experiment in truth." We do not claim to have the whole answer and are glad to be a part of a larger movement seeking peace with justice for Central Americans and others in our world. What we do have to offer is the example of a committed community of people who are willing to speak with their lives for peace and justice. We believe that people speaking from their hearts with their lives can speak to the hearts and consciences of the American people and they will demand a change in the policies of our government from death and destruction to peace and justice.