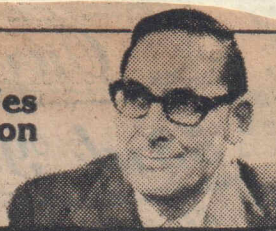


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Was protester a hero or just stupid?

THE maiming of Brian Willson by a munitions train at the Concord Naval Weapons Station last week elicited considerable comment, as letters elsewhere on this page attest.

And if readers' reactions are an accurate reflection of public sentiment, there's precious little sympathy out there for those protesting the shipment of weapons and ammunition to the Reagan administration's Central American clients.

We received more than 50 letters on the subject, and Willson's critics outnumbered his supporters by better than 2-1. The critics tended to focus on the unwisdom of his act; supporters appeared more interested in his cause.

Not that sympathy and compassion were lacking, even among most critics. Ronald W. Ice of Livermore summed up the ambivalence succinctly with: "It's hard to put down someone who has lost both legs defending his rights, but common sense has a place in the world, too."

To which June E. Cooley of San Jose, clearly no fan of the Reagan Central American policy, added, "May I suggest that the protesters expend their energy trying to vote out of office those legislators who play dead and give the president what he wants when he asks for money to carry out this policy."