



Police don't intervene as masked protesters rip up 300 feet of rails just outside naval station's main gate

Examiner/Kim Komenich

At Concord 'peace shrine,' thousands protest

By Craig Marine
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

CONCORD — The wife of Nicaragua's president, singer Joan Baez and the Rev. Jesse Jackson joined several thousand people Saturday near the Concord Naval Weapons Station to protest the maiming of peace activist Brian Willson and call for the end to U.S. intervention in Central America.

Five thousand to 7,000 protesters heard a very speech from Jackson, songs from Baez

and a moving plea from Willson's 14-year-old son, Gabriel, who witnessed his father's accident.

"I'm proud of my father," the boy said. "He was willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for his beliefs."

Willson, 46, was run over by a two-car Navy munitions train Tuesday as he knelt on the tracks outside the weapons station. The train severed one of Willson's legs and mangled the other so badly it had to be amputated at John Muir Memorial Hospital in Walnut Creek. He

also suffered a fractured skull. He was reported to be in fair condition Saturday.

Rosario Murillo, the wife of Nicaragua President Daniel Oretga, visited Willson at the hospital Saturday morning. Before the visit Murillo spent 20 minutes at the site of the accident. She shook her head in disbelief as witnesses told her their accounts of what happened.

"This is a place of pilgrimage for peace," Murillo said, looking at Willson's blood stain.

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OVER TOO

Ortega's v her U.S. vi

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Rosario Murillo refused to say who she'd like to see as the next president of the United States because she was reluctant to comment on "an internal matter."

That was about the only thing the wife of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega was reluctant to talk about during an interview Saturday night at her San Francisco hotel.

Murillo, in the Bay Area to visit with Brian Willson, the Vietnam veteran who lost both of his legs when a Navy munitions train struck him last week, was aware that many saw her visit as a public relations ploy.

"Sure, some people are going to think that way," she said casually. "But, that's not why I came. I came to see Brian and his family, to tell him how much we respect what he has done."

Murillo noted that she had not met with anyone other than Willson and his family, and that, if the press wants her to speak, she has to speak honestly.

Asked about the congressional Iran-contra hearings, the Nicaraguan first lady said that while her countrymen followed the hearings with interest, they did not think any substantial changes in the U.S. policy toward her country would result from them.

"Nothing is about to change because of the hearings," she said. "They were interesting because they put in evidence just how far the present administration is willing to go, violating domestic and international laws, to continue their policy of war."

Murillo, elegant in a red dress and turquoise jewelry, repeatedly spoke of the friendship she says her country is seeking with the people of North America, including those who made Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North a hero.



Karen Grimes, left, with Beth and Oz Grimes, whose black robes and crosses symbolize victims of the contras

Examiner photos by Kim Komenich

PROTEST

— From A-1

through Nicaragua and passed through four battles and two border shelling.

"I can't tell you how many hundreds of amputees Brian and I were with," she said. "How ironic it is that Brian would lose his legs on this soil."

She also played a tape recording from her husband in the hospital.

"Only we can bring peace," said Willson, who served as an Air Force captain during the Vietnam War. "Only we can stop the madness. Each must decide what price he must pay. I'm going to be OK, the doctors tell me. I hope and pray there will be a world peace force built with our dollars and our bodies."

"I really believe we have peace in our hands if we want to pay the price of peace — nonviolent revolution."

Jackson, who is expected to announce his presidential candidacy this week, called Willson a "martyr" and urged the crowd to "continue the struggle" at the weapons station.

"The train that rolled over Brian Willson rolled over all of us," he said, his voice rising. "He was maimed so that we might be whole. Brian lost his legs so that we might walk to freedom, to justice and to peace."

"Let the real America stand up!" Jackson exhorted. He ended his speech by leading the crowd in a chant of "Give peace a chance!"

The rally, an eclectic gathering of young and old, hippies, preppies and punk-rockers, was noisy but generally peaceful.

At one point, though, about 100 protesters tore up 300 feet of rail along Port Chicago Highway and stacked the tiers at the entrance to the weapons station. A Navy official estimated the damage at

\$10,000. Contra Costa County sheriff's deputies and the Highway Patrol officers made no move to arrest anyone.

A banner was hung inside the main gate of the weapons station saying, "This demonstration cost the citizens of Contra Costa County \$4,166 an hour," referring to the large presence of deputies.

Protesters hung their own banner on the razor wire outside the main gates. It said, "The military costs taxpayers \$30 million an hour."

Beth and Oz Grimes of Petaluma stood motionless in front of the facility, dressed in black robes. They

held crosses bearing the names of people they say were killed by the U.S.-backed contras in Nicaragua.

Oz Grimes said that the couple were grandparents whose "statement is our action."

Several demonstrators crossed the boundary line of the weapons station at about 4 p.m., and were escorted to an exit by Contra Costa sheriff's deputies. None of the demonstrators was arrested.

The rally broke up late afternoon and by 6 p.m. only about 200 to 300 people remained, said sheriff's Sgt. Scott Parsons.

on the railroad ties. "This place should be a symbol for the North American people and for the Reagan administration. This was the attitude of a real Christian, somebody who gives so much of himself, of his life. His blood must not have been spent in vain."

The Navy maintains that the train that struck Willson was traveling at about 5 mph, and that the four civilian employees assigned to

'This is a place of pilgrimage for peace'

— Rosario Murillo

watch for people on the tracks, including 130 riding on the front of the locomotive, did not see Willson or the other protesters who leaped free of the train.

Witnesses contend the train was going faster, perhaps 20 mph. A videotape of the accident taken by one of the protesters seems to support that contention.

After Murillo finished her 15-minute visit with Willson, she was overheard telling his wife, Holley Rauen, that Willson, "is a man capable of great love."

Murillo then smiled at Rauen, saying, "He also told me he shares the Nicaraguan passion for peace and baseball."

Willson is an avid fan of the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team.

Rauen also spoke at the rally. She said that last year she and Willson walked more than 70 miles



Singer Joan Baez greets the Rev. Jesse Jackson at protest rally near the Concord naval station

Ortega's wife denies her U.S. visit is ploy

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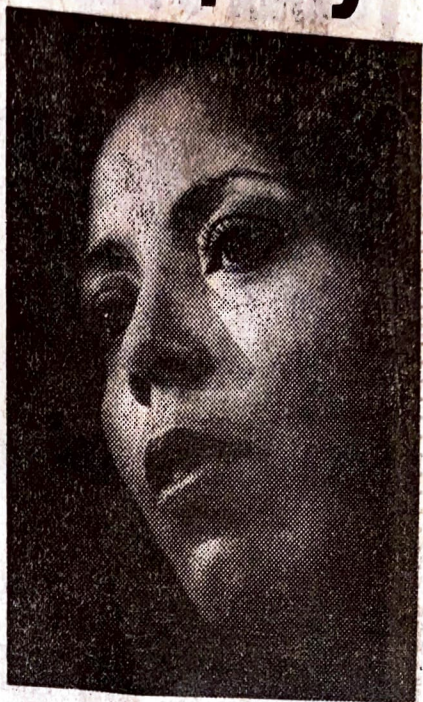
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FIRST LADY ROSARIO MURILLO
Sees 'no change' in U.S. policy

"The people who think North is a hero are not politically informed," she said. "They are unaware and can be manipulated. I don't believe they would feel the same way if they had more awareness," she said with the smile that comes from self-assuredness. "But those are not all of the people. There are more people like Brian Willson, who are willing to give, to work for change, to be compassionate."

The United States is determined to portray her country as a threat, she said, because the changes in Nicaragua since the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza was overthrown in 1979 threaten the way America deals with the rest of the world.

"What we are doing in Nicaragua is building a society that is independent, with our own internal and foreign policies," Murillo said. "This is a dangerous example to the United States because they are used to telling countries what to do. The U.S. government has shown no willingness to recognize the Nicaraguan peoples' right to self-determination. We have dignity."