

Free speech costly to Concord station protesters

Rumors of pay dismissed by weapons foes

By Judy Ronningen
Staff writer

CONCORD — For the Nuremberg Actions Committee, the cost of free speech is about \$8,000 a month.

Protesters say donations — most in the \$10 to \$50 range — allow them to support an office, a copy machine, a telephone and an office staff of four who organize the 24-hour-a-day protest at the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

But paying protesters? They say no way.

Rumors are rampant that protesters who sit on the railroad tracks at the weapons station get \$40 a day, \$48, or are paid the minimum wage. The rumors say they get more money if they are arrested.

"Are you serious?" laughed Spaulding Brooks, 18, one of the group that keeps an overnight vigil there. "I had heard that, but I didn't think anyone believed it."

"If they believe that, why do they yell 'Get a job!'" he asked.

"I don't think they could pay you enough to sit out here in the cold and the rain," said Shannah Kurland, 20. "It just doesn't work that way."

One of the rumors is that a protester told a sheriff's deputy they were paid. Another story is that a report is circulating on the weapons station to that effect.

Dan Tikalsky, weapons station spokesman, said there is no such report. Bill Landis, the sheriff's deputy assigned full time to the weapons station, said no protester ever told him that he or she was paid and he doubts a protester would tell that to a deputy. Both men said they heard the same rumors as everyone else.

The Rev. David Wylie, the Nuremberg Actions Committee fund raiser, said the group has received about \$40,000 in donations since

Sept. 1, when Brian Willson was maimed as he sat on the railroad tracks trying to stop a weapons train.

He said \$20,000 was donated to Willson during a rally the weekend after the accident. Willson gave \$15,000 of that to keep the protest going.

Wylie said he's heard the rumors that the Nuremberg Actions Committee is supported by Soviet front groups.

If that is true, he says, there are a lot of Soviet agents out there. Most of their donations come in denominations of \$10 to \$50, and there have been hundreds of them.

"If there was a government doing this," he snorts, "you'd think they could do a better job."

The financial records of the Nuremberg Actions Committee, which were opened to the Times, show nearly 750 separate donations — both to the committee and to a trust fund for Brian Willson — since late September.

Retired volunteer Jean Bovard keeps the books two days a week for the Nuremberg Actions Committee and the Mt. Diablo Peace Center in Walnut Creek, which is sharing its office with the weapons station group. Last month, she got a donated computer to keep her records.

Bovard said that during the first few hectic weeks after Willson was hurt — and when she was out of town — the volume of mail was so great the group entered totals but not individual donations.

Since then, the largest donation recorded was a \$2,000 grant from the National Community Fund. The Pacific Peace Fund gave \$1,000.

Donations also came from groups such as the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, which sent \$125; Friends Home in Santa Rosa, \$50; North Bronx Social Action, \$25; the Prescott Peace Network, \$30; the American-Soviet Friendship Society, \$50; and the First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, \$100.

The vast majority of donors listed on the books are individuals with \$10, \$25, \$30 or \$50 written after their names.

Wylie said fund-raisers include house parties and mailed appeals

for donations. A mailing in December netted more than \$10,000. Wylie said he attended one house party in Southern California where they raised about \$1,000.

On Friday night, Nuremberg Actions sponsored a dance featuring "The Pencilnecks" in Berkeley to raise money for the upcoming trial of 33 people arrested at the tracks — the so-called "Concord 33." Wylie estimates that filing fees, telephone bills and other legal costs will total \$5,000, even though the lawyers work for free.

Wylie said the group spends \$8,000 to \$9,000 a month. About \$4,000 goes for salaries for Wylie; Pam Miller, who coordinates the protest at the track; Jay Henderick, office manager; and Ellen Danchik, who coordinates the legal defenses of protesters who are arrested.

Part of Danchik's job is to schedule approximately 30 lawyers and 10 other legal workers who volunteer to defend the protesters.

About \$1,500 goes for phone bills, another \$1,500 for mailings and the rest on expenses such as its \$80 share of the rent for the Mt. Diablo Peace Center in Walnut Creek.

The financial records do not show payments to protesters at the tracks, whose names are well-known because of the number of times they have been arrested.

A majority of protesters at the tracks say they are retired, or hold part-time jobs, or work during the day and come to the weapons station early in the morning or on weekends. There are eight to 12 people who spend most of their time at the tracks.

Wylie said the group is philosophically opposed to paying pickets, and some members don't even believe in paying the office staff.

"We'll never be able to pay anyone at the tracks," he said. "And really, we don't want to."



Staff photo/Jon McNally
CHRIS BANKERT, 18, is a "full-time," and, according to the Nuremberg Actions Committee, unpaid, weapons station protester.