

Yet another protest day at Concord

Homeless try to encamp at naval weapons station

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A protest outside the gates of the Concord Naval Weapons Station on Saturday turned into something of an exercise in control.

Protesters, some 400 strong, tried to control the mood. They brought in three busloads of homeless people from San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley and built a small shantytown to symbolize the plight of Salvadoran refugees.

Law enforcement officers tried to control the protest. There was an officer for about every two protesters. Police destroyed the shantytown and turned on lawn sprinklers to encourage the protesters to go home, actions that irked the demonstrators.

'Seemed foolish'

"The whole thing seemed rather foolish to me," said Darla Rucker of Richmond, who helped organize the protest by the anti-war groups Pledge of Resistance and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.

Protests at the Concord site have become routine, with activist group after activist group choosing the site to make its pitch to the public. It was there, on Sept. 1, that S. Brian Willson was run over by a train while protesting, and suffered injuries that cost him his legs.

Protesters claim that weapons are shipped from the facility to El Salvador.

On Saturday, protesters turned the focus of their rally to homelessness.

"There are homeless in El Salvador because of bombs from this country. And there are homeless here because of our military budget," Rucker said.

Protesters struck

She claimed that police with clubs hit several protesters as officers tried to tear down the shantytown, built of cardboard and plywood. Her husband, she said, was hit in the jaw. As authorities — including officers from the Sheriff's Department, Concord police and the California Highway Patrol — approached each of the lean-tos, protesters gathered around the shacks and perched inside.

Police described a more orderly encounter.

"There was very little confrontation," said Lt. Robert Henderson of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department.

Four protesters were arrested on suspicion of battery and released at the scene.