

La Voz de Esperanza

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SAN ANTONIO, TEJAS

San Antonio

FREE SPEECH COALITION

**Our Streets Will
Not Be Silenced!**



**¡Las Calles
No Se Callan!**

210.228.0201

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- We advocate for a wide variety of social, economic & environmental justice issues.
- Opinions expressed in La Voz are not necessarily those of the Esperanza Center.

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Articles due by the 5th of each month

Policy Statements

* We ask that articles be visionary, progressive, instructive, & thoughtful. Submissions must be literate & critical; not sexist, racist, homophobic, violent, or oppressive & may be edited for length.

* All letters in response to Esperanza activities or articles in La Voz will be considered for publication. Letters with intent to slander individuals or groups will not be published.

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Our Streets Will Not Be Silenced! • ¡Las Calles No Se Callan!

...are the slogans that the Free Speech Coalition representing 23 community groups has adopted as we move forward with a lawsuit against the City of San Antonio, TX challenging the new March Ordinance that arbitrarily charges some groups exorbitant rates to march down city streets, while exempting others. As the November 17th trial date approaches, the Free Speech Coalition is working to get the word out to as many people as possible. We encourage you to pick up the bumper stickers and yard signs shown on the cover of this month's Voz from the Esperanza and help spread the word about the free speech issue. You can also host a cafecito house party to educate your friends and neighbors. When Judge Xavier Rodríguez drives through the neighborhoods of San Antonio, we want him to know that each bumper sticker and yard sign represents a whole set of people who know about the lawsuit and who believe we have the right to march and protest in our own streets.

Buena gente can help by joining the Free Speech Coalition meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of each month or the International Woman's Day Committee meetings on 1st Mondays. You can help host a speaker from the Free Speech Coalition, or arrange for a performance of Teatro Callejero by calling Amanda at 210.228.0201. Teatro Callejero has performed at 1st Friday events and the Diez y Seis festival at Plaza Guadalupe. The Media Committee will also need help writing Op Ed pieces and Letters to the Editor. A short video on the Free Speech Coalition is also available for use.

At present, the City has requested that Judge Rodríguez lift the injunction against the ordinance. If this request is granted, it will mean people in San Antonio will be charged for street marches, violating our 1st Amendment Right to freedom of speech and silencing political dissent on any number of important political issues. An injunction hearing may be set for mid-October. The community's support has been solidly behind us and we expect a large turnout at each court appearance, as always. Call us to be put on our contact list.

The connections between our local efforts challenging the San Antonio march ordinance and the Republican National Convention demonstrations on the streets of St. Paul, MN are not coincidental. More and more, any kind of dissent and criticism of the US government is being quashed. It recently became clear that this issue of La Voz would continue looking at public space and the oppressive attempts to limit public assembly and dissent.

With the news that Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now!, had been arrested at the RNC protests on the 1st of September along with other journalists, we began to search for an article from someone who experienced the "police state" atmosphere that included the use of pepper spray, rubber bullets, concussion grenades and excessive force against protesters and journalists. The final number of arrests in St. Paul reportedly was as high as 500.

The article that would have given Voz readers a first hand account of the RNC protests was abruptly put on hold in the last days of this issue's layout when police in St. Paul used search and seizure tactics to intimidate those that had taken any part in the RNC protests. In the meantime, our own buena gente de San Antonio who have a long tradition of peaceful protests have recently suffered at the hands of local police. Frank Valdez details three cases of this trickle down brutality that has ensued in recent months. Our rights to protest are being threatened, so resist we must! Come by the Esperanza and pick up your yard signs and bumper stickers, ¡LAS CALLES NO SE CALLAN! Our Streets Will Not Be Silenced!

As October begins, do not forget to write your Calaveras satirizing personalities, políticos and gente viva for Día de los muertos. Remember that we also include a section in the November Voz to pay tribute to loved ones who have departed. Send your calaveras, articles, & tributes by **October 8th** to: lavoz@esperanzacenter.org

-Mil Gracias, La Voz editor and Esperanza staff

ATTENTION VOZ READERS: If you have a correction you want to make on your mailing label please send it in to lavoz@esperanzacenter.org. If you do not wish to continue on the mailing list for whatever reason please notify us as well. La Voz is provided as a courtesy to people on the mailing list of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. **The subscription rate is now \$30 per year.** The cost of producing and mailing La Voz has substantially increased and we need your help to keep it afloat. To help, send in your subscriptions, sign up as a monthly donor, or send in a donation to the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. Thank you. -GAR

VOZ VISION STATEMENT: La Voz de Esperanza speaks for many individual, progressive voices who are gente-based, multi-visioned and milagro-bound. We are diverse survivors of materialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, classism, violence, earth-damage, speciesism and cultural and political oppression. We are recapturing the powers of alliance, activism and healthy conflict in order to achieve interdependent economic/spiritual healing and fuerza. La Voz is a resource for peace, justice, and human rights, providing a forum for criticism, information, education, humor and other creative works. La Voz provokes bold actions in response to local and global problems, with the knowledge that the many risks we take for the earth, our body, and the dignity of all people will result in profound change for the seven generations to come.



Free Speech Crackdown in S.A.



Photo: Amanda, Justice and Ronnie of Teatro Callejero walking with props after the 1st Friday event in July. Of the three, only Ronnie was harassed by police and issued a citation.

By Frank (Pancho) Valdez

Recently, many of us were reminded of the summer of 1968 when Chicago police attacked anti-war protestors outside the Democratic National Convention. This time the scene was St. Paul, Minnesota sight of the 2008 Republican National Convention. There the police along with the FBI arrested about 500 people not only at the convention sight, but even in the wee hours of the morning before the convention began! Some attribute this zealous activity by the police to the Patriot Act and the so-called war on terrorism. Others, see this as America's wake up call!

In San Antonio, local police (SAPD) began their actions on July 4th of all days. According to Ronnie Webb a member of Teatro Callejero a local street theater group that was performing skits at First Friday in the King William district. The skits were developed and carried out to bring attention to the local city ordinance that gives the police department sole discretion as to what organizations can use city streets to march for free and which organizations are to be charged fees (usually very exorbitant ones).

Mr. Webb stated that the skits were received well and at no time did any one make any type of complaint over the material presented. Webb stated that the police in groups kept an eye on the skits and after the group decided to depart that is when the problem began. Due to large props that the theater group members were carrying, they chose to walk on the street in order to avoid forcing other pedestrians on the sidewalks to either be struck or have to wait. (First Friday events tend to be very crowded) A bike patrol cop rode by the departing theater group and directed them to get off the street and onto the sidewalk. The group obeyed and the police officer came back demanding to see Webb's identification. The cop stated that Webb had *refused* to comply with his directive and therefore warranted a citation.

When Webb tried to explain that as the officer was speaking to him he (Webb) was standing on the sidewalk and how was that disobeying his directive, the police officer and another bike cop then decided to brand Webb as having an "attitude" and he was issued the citation for refusing to get off the street. Webb's court date is September 16th in Municipal Court. He could be fined as much as \$500 for this "infraction"! Mr. Webb was encouraged to speak to the ACLU and/or Maria Teresa Brito a local attorney representing another victim of Free Speech violations by SAPD.

About eight days later, on Saturday the 12th of July, disabled veteran Tom Bell experienced a similar situation from San Antonio's finest. Mr. Bell an activist with the San Antonio Healthcare Now Coalition was in front of the Alamo on a public

sidewalk passing out literature on House Resolutions 676, a federal bill that would guarantee ALL residents of the U.S. single payer healthcare coverage. He was initially spoken to by a San Antonio Parks Policeman but allowed to continue when Bell informed him that he had received clearance from the San Antonio Department of Community Affairs to engage in the distribution of the literature. This same Parks policeman demanded from a woman selling raspa (snow cones) that she remove the H.R. 676 literature as her permit was to sell raspa from her cart and not distribute literature. This of course intimidated the woman and her enthusiasm for Mr. Bell and his literature immediately diminished. Later a police officer with the bike patrol from SAPD demanded to see a permit from Bell to distribute literature. When Bell explained that no permit was necessary to exercise his Free Speech rights the cop became belligerent. The police officer issued Bell a citation and threatened him with arrest if he did not sign the citation for "aggressive solicitation". Mr. Bell's final court date is October 3rd. He is being represented by Ms. Brito as he does not feel that he has done anything illegal and adamantly denies soliciting the public for anything. "All I was doing was asking them to read the literature after they received it. I did not solicit any money, or anything of value as the word solicit is defined!"

On August 21st shortly after noon, a bike patrol officer approached Tom Keene and Juan (Johnny) Martinez as they held a large banner on the corner of S. Flores and Dolorosa near the San Fernando Cathedral. The banner read: STOP EXECUTIONS! The officer immediately demanded from the two in a loud, aggressive voice that they lay down the banner. When Mr. Martinez moved to be sure he was not blocking pedestrian traffic the policeman became angry and threw Martinez to the sidewalk! Martinez used profanity only AFTER he had been thrown to the sidewalk. Martinez who is 71 years old sustained bruises on his left eye, his forearms and legs as a result of the cop's rough treatment. He was charged with resisting arrest, using profanity and failing to comply with an order from a police officer. Both Martinez and Keene contend that at no time were they blocking pedestrian movement on the sidewalk nor did either of them do anything to provoke the officer to react with so much anger and

"Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freedom of speech!"

- Benjamin Franklin, Author, Revolutionary and Scientist

Jobs with Justice

force. Both men also stated that they have been protesting the death penalty and/or the Iraqi war for about 10 years and have never been bothered by any officer from either the Sheriff's department, SAPD or the Park Police. Another bike officer who knows Keene and Martinez appeared puzzled when he saw that Martinez was being arrested. Mr. Martinez stated; "this guy knows us and he knows we are not looking for trouble!" Martinez and Keene went on to say that the hostile officer appeared to be looking for an altercation and a reason to abuse his authority.

Martinez spent about two days at the County jail and was eventually released. Martinez and Keene have been in touch with the ACLU and plan to fight the case. It should be noted that the banner was confiscated by the police and to this day has not been returned to either man. The banner is property of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the organization is also lending support to Mr. Martinez.

At present the Free Speech Coalition which includes some 23 organizations including the International Women's Day March Committee and the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center have an injunction against the City of San Antonio in Federal court due to the ordinance passed last November by the City Council. While only Webb's case is directly connected to this court case the other two cases are similar in that they also involve the issue of free speech and the city of San Antonio's attempt to quash this most vital right.

While these cases may not appear as extreme as the cases

in St. Paul and elsewhere, they are just a small example of the pattern that is rapidly developing across the nation as the reign of George W. Bush comes to an end. In St. Paul journalists were

hit with pepper spray, handcuffed and arrested including noted journalist Amy Goodman host of the radio program Democracy Now!

The feeling among local activists is that the activity by the San Antonio Police Department must be addressed! As one local activist said; "the cops are out of control and they are unaccountable

...the oppressive activity by the San Antonio Police Department must be addressed.

for their behavior. It is our right and duty to hold them accountable or we face the consequence of losing our rights to assemble and free speech." Others are in agreement expressing this sentiment at a meeting of the Free Speech Coalition held on September 9th at the Esperanza

Peace & Justice Center. There an audience of 46 persons listened to the update of the lawsuit and the incidents of police harassment to the three activists. A good number of people new to the Coalition volunteered to join the local movement to protect our right to free speech.

Bio: Pancho Valdez is a social worker, co-chair of the San Antonio Healthcare Now Coalition and a veteran of 40 plus years in the civil rights, labor and peace movements. Contact: fv.agitator@gmail.com

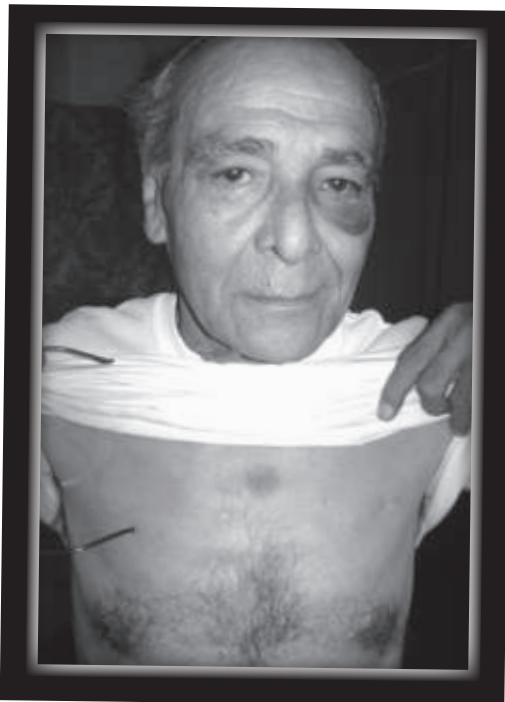


Photo: Johnny Martinez shows bruises from police.

Currently, there are several struggles going on in San Antonio that warrant our attention:

One, is the ongoing struggle at City Public Service Energy between the bosses and members of IBEW Local 500. CPS is forcing workers to do the jobs of 2 and 3 workers, eroding services to the community and putting community members and workers in danger. The safety and welfare of our community is at stake.

Another issue involving public safety is the struggle between Bexar County Adult Probation Officers and the Chief Probation Officer. There, the president of the Central Texas Public Employees Association (USWA) was unjustly fired and an atmosphere of hostility and intimidation has surfaced. Probation officers were disarmed putting many of them in danger and recently, probation officers were forced to use a lab with questionable practices resulting in the jailing of innocent probationers. Again, anti-labor management is denying probationers and probation officers their legal rights as well as putting the community in danger.

Along with the above issues is the ongoing organizing drive by RNs at University, Baptist and Methodist Hospitals. Management at all of these hospitals continues to overwork these skilled professionals endangering patients and forcing nurses to quit due to burnout!

These labor related issues affect the community at large. The worker's struggle becomes the struggle of all of us. Therefore, I am putting out a proposal that we organize a local Jobs With Justice chapter. Jobs With Justice has a national reputation for combining labor, community and church activists in various struggles for justice. As activists we cannot forget the time proven adage: An injury to one is an injury to all!

If you are interested in organizing a local Jobs With Justice or know someone who might be contact Frank at: 210.882.2230 or fv.agitator@gmail.com

- Yours For Social & Economic Justice, Frank Valdez, Co-Chair San Antonio Healthcare Now Coalition

An injury to one is an injury to all!

