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PEACE TIMES

# PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

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## Local activists join protests against Afghanistan war

Jon Britton

Within days of ordering the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, George W. Bush predicted an easy victory: "People often ask me, 'how long will this last?' It may happen tomorrow, it may happen a month from now, it may take a year or two, but we will prevail."

Eight years later, tens of thousands of Afghans are now dead from the invasion and occupation. So too are nearly fifteen hundred troops from the U.S./NATO forces. Thousands more have been wounded. As the war continues, those numbers will shoot way up in a colonial-type occupation that could last for years to come.

Dozens of protests around the country marked the eighth anniversary of the war.

The first series of protests around the country occurred on Wednesday, October 7, the actual date of the U.S. invasion in 2001. The San Jose Peace & Justice Center organized a protest at Representative Zoe Lofgren's 16th Congressional District office. About twenty protesters submitted a petition with about 120 names that stated: "We demand a rapid withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the closing of bases, and tireless diplomatic engagement with Afghan and Pakistan governments. We demand that war funds be reallocated to meet the needs of the American people: health care, jobs, education and infrastructure."

Two of the largest protests on the West Coast on October 7 were after-work picket lines and rallies in Los Angeles and San Francisco. These were organized by ANSWER and endorsed by many progressive groups. "Hey Obama, yes we can, troops out of Afghanistan!" protesters chanted as passing cars honked in support.

There was another antiwar rally in San Francisco on October 17. This rally was organized by the National Assembly To End the Wars and Occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and endorsed by many progressive groups, including the San Jose Peace & Justice Center. The turnout for the rally was about 1,000.

On December 1, President Obama addressed the nation and announced an increase of 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. The San Jose Peace & Justice Center



*Roz Dean (l), Joan Bazar (r) and other members of the San Jose Peace & Justice Center protest troop escalation during President Obama's address on December 1.*



*Annie and the Vets and Veterans for Peace Chapter 101 perform at the October 17 Antiwar Rally in San Francisco.*

held a protest in front of MLK Library during Obama's speech. About forty people attended the protest, and the protest was covered on the local news.

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# Peace and justice movement at crossroads

Sharat G. Lin

When the first U.S. invasion of Iraq loomed like an inexorable dark storm in December 1990, millions of people marched in protest around the world, including over 200,000 people on Market Street in San Francisco. Many participants, like myself, pondered that this spontaneous outpouring of antiwar activism was made possible by the legacy of mass struggles against the Vietnam war twenty years earlier.

The first U.S. war against Iraq was short, but sustained protests continued for twelve long years against the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by Republican and Democratic administrations alike, and against U.S.-led wars to break up the former Yugoslavia. Full-scale antiwar protests resumed in February 2003 once it became clear that the Bush administration was intent on attacking Iraq a second time regardless of pretexts. A hundred thousand marched in San Francisco and over 5,000 marched in San Jose. Grass roots activism gave rise to the largest antiwar demonstrations in San Jose's history.

However, as the Iraq war dragged on seemingly without end, antiwar activism began to decline after the war's peak in 2004. Even in San Francisco the numbers declined to some ten thousand at the close of the Bush administration and several thousand in March 2009, the first during the Obama administration. Even in the wake of mounting U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan and talk of sending 40,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan, no more than a thousand protesters showed up at each of two demonstrations in San Francisco in October 2009.

People's passion to act varies not so much with what has already happened, but with the perception of threats ahead and whether those threats are not only rising or declining, but accelerating or decelerating. This mass psychology is similar to that driving stock markets across the globe. Markets begin to weaken not when economic indicators go into decline, but earlier when growth decelerates. Conversely, the significant rise in global stock markets since the beginning of 2009 was a response to deceleration in economic

contraction, such as factory orders or layoffs.

Public sentiment for protest has also been influenced by the transition from the most militaristic anti-people U.S. administration ever to that of the first African-American president espousing one of the most reformist agendas since the New Deal. On top of the perceived deceleration of conflict in Iraq, this political transition has caused some people to drop out of street protests, perhaps out of fatigue after 18 years of continuous protest. Therefore, the scales of protest mobilizations are at least as much a result of circumstances as they are the product of deliberate organizing. President Obama's decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan with 30,000 additional troops is a sharp acceleration that has sparked a spontaneous resurgence of protest. Meanwhile, proposed reforms are getting watered down and delayed.

Meanwhile, new movements emerge, such as the struggles to sustain local services and public education in California in the face of unprecedented budgetary deficits at the state level. Some campaigns have already begun to bear fruit, such as the effort to bring comprehensive medical services back to downtown San Jose. There is more solidarity today between different movements, such as immigrant rights, trade union organizing, and health care reform. There is more crossover between ethnic communities, and between activism on domestic social issues and war. There is also more awareness than ever that everyday social problems are rooted in the economic system itself, not merely in its aberrations or excesses.

The San Jose Peace & Justice Center held its first Peace and Justice Town Hall on September 7, 2009. One of its purposes was to open a dialog on the direction of the peace and justice movement in general, and shaping the San Jose Peace & Justice Center in particular for the tasks that lie ahead. Immediate tasks include training for activists, and increased interaction between the San Jose Peace and Justice Center and its community partners. Future town halls will continue to develop strategies for traversing crossroads in the peace and justice movement.

## SJPJC Community Partners

Association for India's Development  
Code Pink-South Bay  
Cop Watch  
South Bay Awareness Project  
Friends of South Asia  
Green Party of Santa Clara County  
Health Care for All-CA, Silicon Valley  
Human Agenda

Labor Party San Jose Organizing Committee  
MAIZ National Lawyers Guild  
Nihonmachi Outreach Committee  
Older Women's League (OWL)  
our developing world  
Peace & Social Order Committee--  
San Jose Monthly Meeting (Quakers)

Social Justice Committee of First Unitarian Church, San Jose  
South Bay Mobilization  
Veterans for Peace, Chapter 101  
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom-San Jose

## Over one thousand march in Santa Clara for immigration reform

**Viridiana Reyes, Services, Immigrants Rights & Education Network (SIREN)**

Under a banner that read "Family Unity Cannot Wait" over a thousand faith and community leaders and community members participated on a day of action on October 15 and called on Department of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to cease expansion, support and enforcement of policies that hurt family unity and go against values of justice and fairness. DHS Secretary Napolitano, a Santa Clara University alumna, gave a speech on October 15 about border security.

Beginning at 4:30 p.m., people began gathering at Lafayette Park in Santa Clara for a rally and march. Families, workers and students carried signs that read "Family Unity", "Police Protection, Not Deportation", "Immigration Policies Destroy Families", "Border Policies Kill Innocent People". Jesse Castañeda, leader from People Acting in Community Together, and Angelica Salas, executive director for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), began the rally by calling on Congress, Janet Napolitano, and other members of the Obama Administration to deliver on their promise of change and get to work on a just and humane immigration reform bill.

Participants expressed their support for a practical solution that allows them the freedom to diversify and train their workforce. Many union members marched and chanted their support for immigration reform.

"There are close to twelve million hard-working, undocumented workers in this country. As long as those workers are marginalized and vulnerable to exploitation from employers, all workers will be hurt by lower wages and standards. Now is the time for comprehensive immigration reform," stated Sylvia Ruiz, Political Director, SEIU United Service Workers



**Community members hold candles at the October 15 rally.**

West.

After the rally, the participants marched around Santa Clara University and stopped on the corner of Lafayette Street and Homestead Road, behind Meyer Theatre where Secretary Napolitano was speaking.

Rally organizers reminded attendees that good will alone will not move Congress. Supporters need to do two simple things: send a postcard to DHS Secretary Napolitano asking her to deliver on the President's request for an immigration bill and text message the words "justice" or "justicia" and dial 69866. The national network will send periodic action alerts to those who sign up.

## Peace Center joins Santa Clara County anti-death penalty coalition

**Valerie Face, Santa Clara County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty**

The San Jose Peace & Justice Center, along with other grassroots organizations, has joined the Santa Clara County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (SCCADP). Its goals are to:

- Stop use of the death penalty in Santa Clara County.
- Prepare the voters of Santa Clara County to defeat any state initiative to expand or speed up the death penalty; and
- Prepare the voters of Santa Clara County to support a state initiative to end the death penalty.

In this time of budget crisis, there are strong financial arguments against the use of the death penalty:

Sentencing someone to execution costs a county far more than permanent incarceration. A recent report found that a trial seeking execution in California costs at least \$1.1 million more than a trial seeking permanent imprisonment, also called "life without parole."

The death penalty costs the state millions more than permanent imprisonment. The California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice found that housing and processing appeals for all those on death row costs California taxpayers \$137 million each year. If all 680 inmates were sentenced to permanent imprisonment instead of execution, it would only cost \$11 million each year, a savings of \$128

million.

Furthermore, since 1973, 135 people have been freed from death row in the U.S. based on evidence that they were in fact innocent. The conviction of innocent people and other problems with the death penalty have led a majority of nations, most major religions, and 15 states in the U.S. to reject the death penalty. The District Attorney in San Francisco has rejected the death penalty in favor of other alternatives, allowing her to invest in proven violence prevention programs.

The SCCADP is asking Santa Clara County organizations, religious congregations and community groups to adopt a resolution calling for the Santa Clara District Attorney to pursue alternatives to the death penalty and for the District Attorney and Board of Supervisors to reprioritize use of their limited resources in order to solve homicides, prevent violence and implement effective public safety programs. The San Jose Peace & Justice Center recently adopted this resolution. The SCCADP will gather these resolutions to present to Santa Clara County officials.

Membership in the SCCADP is open to both organization and individuals. Please contact the San Jose Peace & Justice Center if you would like to join.

This article was adapted from an article published in the Summer 2009 ACLU Santa Clara Valley Chapter Newsletter.

# Iraq War Veterans' Contagious Love Experiment

Phil Pflager

A very successful and inspiring event was held at the San Jose Peace and Justice Center when Veterans for Peace (VFP) Chapter 101 and the San Jose Peace and Justice Center hosted two Iraq veterans, Josh Stieber and Conor Curran, who have been traveling around the country on foot and bicycle with a message of love and peace. Their project is described on their web site, contagiousloveexperiment.wordpress.com

VFP members provided a variety of soups and bread and Shirley Lin Kinoshita brought a large bag of dinner rolls to add to the fare.

The meal was followed by an enthralling hour long talk by the two Iraq veterans, They received a standing ovation as the applause thundered on. Josh and Conor answered questions and spoke with the audience until nearly 9 pm.



*VFP Chapter 101 and Peace Center members enjoy dinner with Josh Stieber and Connor Curran.*

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## Yes, I'd like to donate to the San Jose Peace & Justice Center!

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Pledge: monthly, quarterly \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to SJPJC, 48 S. 7th St., #101, San Jose CA 95112 or donate online at [sanjosepeace.org](http://sanjosepeace.org)

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