



Kurt Ellison

Elizabeth Jones, left, and Roz Reddick of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, helped organize the bake sale yesterday for its Tax Day protest at the Plaza.

Sparse crowds at tax day protest

Speakers say social programs sacrificed for military

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

Road construction on Main Street cut down on foot traffic at the Watsonville Plaza yesterday, but that didn't discourage members of the Pajaro Valley chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from holding a spirited tax-day protest there.

At the beginning of the noon-time rally, speakers and organizers outnumbered the audience, but eventually a small crowd gathered to listen. Some in the audience were enticed by cake and other sweets provided by the women's group.

The speeches and literature were presented in both Spanish and English.

The Plaza pavilion was surrounded by hand-lettered signs bearing such messages as, "One aircraft carrier or meals for 20 million people." Another equated college grants to the cost of attack submarines.

Earlier in the day, members gathered at the post office and passed out about 150 leaflets letting people know where their tax dollars are being spent.

Member Jean Pirano said

people seemed interested in what the group had to say.

"No one turned away" from taking a leaflet, she said.

Some of the speakers urged the audience not to pay the portion of their taxes that is spent on the military. But chapter members said their goal yesterday was to increase awareness about tax spending and to gather support for a change in priorities for government spending. Cake and other baked goods were being sold for a donation, and buyers were asked to place their money in one of two jars — one that said "Money for Military," and another that said, "Money for People's Needs" — to show their support for where tax dollars should be spent. By 1 p.m., no one had dropped a penny in the military jar.

According to the League, 54 percent of every tax dollar went to the military last year. Another 11 percent went to general government, 4 percent went to the savings and loan bailout and 6 percent went to managing the country's physical resources. Twenty-five percent, the organization says, went to social services. The League is

calling for an immediate 50 percent reduction in military spending and the use of those funds for education, health care, housing and other social services needs.

Yolanda Navarro, a former Green Giant worker who was laid off last year when the plant shifted much of its Watsonville operations to Mexico, spoke first.

Navarro said she never paid much attention to politics until the layoffs, when she became active with a worker's group, Trabajadores Desplazados, that has organized a boycott of Grand Met, Green Giant's parent company, and is active in opposing the free-trade agreement with Mexico.

"When I found out that the majority of money that we pay goes to nuclear war, I was really surprised," she said. "I never would have thought that."

That money, she said, should go to "educate our children" and to provide for the poor, rather than to "protect the interests of the rich, like in the Iraq war."

Santa Cruz City Councilman Scott Kennedy also spoke, say-

ing that he and his wife have not paid the portion of their taxes that would go to the military for the last 22 years.

Kennedy said his refusal to pay war taxes grew out of a realization he had during the Vietnam War that as a taxpayer, he was partly responsible for the My Lai massacre because he helped pay for the weapons used there.

Kennedy told the audience that if they were opposed to their taxes being used for the military they had "an obligation" not to pay them.

Barry van Driel, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Nuclear Freeze, who has lived in Holland, told the audience that he thinks the United States should adopt the attitude of that country on taxation.

In Holland, he said, "the strongest shoulders carry the heaviest burden." The wealthiest people there pay 73 percent of their income in taxes.

Van Driel also said he decided to stop paying "war taxes" after his brother went to fight in the Persian Gulf War.

"I was supporting my brother going to the Persian Gulf," he said.