



No Free Speech: Another Symptom of Corporate Domination of Our Lives

by Frank (Pancho) Valdez

Several weeks ago I attended a meeting of the **San Antonio Free Speech Coalition** at the **Esperanza Peace & Justice Center**. I volunteered to submit an article on the issue of free speech and began churning one out only to somehow lose it on the computer. While this loss was an inconvenience, the new article will perhaps be more appropriate as it is inclusive of more than just the issue of free speech.

On Saturday, February 9th, I rented the film **Border Town** starring Jennifer Lopez, Antonio Banderas, Sonia Braga, Martin Sheen and Maya Zapata. To my surprise the movie told a story about the plight of women maquiladora workers in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The story of these victims of brutal murder and rape has become an issue not only on the U.S. – Mexican border, but across the world as well.

Border Town not only sheds light on the murders it also exposes the collusion of the governments of the U.S. and Mexico with the corporations that own and operate the maquiladoras. It exposes the low wages paid to the maquiladora workers (\$5.00 per day), the horrific working conditions inside the factories, the unsanitary, unsafe housing that is forced on these workers as well as the gross injustices imposed on these women workers under the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**.

Whether in Mexico or in the U.S. people must be allowed to express their opposition to such injustices. Our right to free speech is rapidly becoming lost as corporate America pressures

government officials and news media alike to put as many obstacles in front of us as possible. A truly free press is vital for truth to be disseminated. The adverse effects of **NAFTA** are not at the top of the list for most newspapers or electronic media. Free speech is never free when one opposes the exploitation and injustices of the powerful corporate interests!

Locally, the **International Women's Day March** faces restrictions as the San Antonio City Council has imposed blatantly unconstitutional regulations as to who can and who cannot use public streets to express themselves. Attempting to bring attention to issues such as the murders of women on the border and the complicity of U.S. corporations will be limited unless we organize and **RESIST!**

It is imperative that we show our solidarity with the murdered women and those exploited in the maquiladoras. These women were someone's daughters, someone's mothers, someone's wives. Their struggle is **OUR** struggle! We must have a good turn out of marchers on March 8th. We must also show our opposition to the repressive

City ordinance that would limit our free speech rights! We must never forget the words of the great Chicana labor activist Emma Tenayuca; **We are not a conquered people!**

Bio: Frank Valdez is a local social justice activist with more than 40 years in the civil rights, labor and peace movements. At present he is co-chair for the San Antonio Healthcare-Now Coalition.



The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras in S.A.

polity. These are the places where those who do not have any say in what the media and government argue about gather to force, yes force, those who are used to telling the people what to care about to listen to us, if only briefly. Public space is the only place in our entire society where we have both the ability and the right to speak truth to power. The plan to charge us for that right would reduce democracy to a market transaction and would diminish public space from a public sphere to a mere commodity.

The City Council apparently does not understand the difference between selling the spaces of the city to those who can pay and holding public space in the public trust as a democratic forum. If the City Council believed in democracy then it would not discriminate against the voices of the poor, but this is the

groups to use the streets without charge due to the supposed benefit to all that these uses produce the city betrays its contempt for the voices of those who engage in speech that is critical rather than celebratory. The city attempts to co-opt what were formerly defiant marches against power and to recreate them as tourist spectacles. Those parades that are excepted from the ordinance are those that portray the city of San Antonio as a place to visit, as a place to spend money, as a place with no need for people to take to the streets. However, what we are left with is a city in which it is illegal for the poor and those whose views diverge from those of power to speak where they might be heard. In essence, the city is attempting to regulate people and politics through the regulation of public space via market mechanisms, not democratic values.

public space is for the people to engage each other as members of the polity.

very thing it proposes to do. Charging people to march doubly discriminates against those who are already excluded from most of public life. Anyone who can afford to pay the city the fees it requests is likely to be able to buy their way into formal politics, but public space should be available especially for those who cannot afford such participation. Further, by allowing certain

By subjecting public space to an economic logic the city distorts democracy by giving the rich and the uncontroversial space while the rest are left, literally, with no place in the system.

Bio: Nathan Clough is a Ph.D. candidate in Urban Political Geography at the University of Minnesota studying the role of public space in democratic politics and how the control of space is used as a way to control the conduct of people.