

SoupCrime in San Francisco

The round-em-up, drive-em-out Matrix program is still in full flower under the newly funded Operation Park. Homeless sleepers are being cited, their bedding and shopping carts taken and destroyed. Willie Brown's city officialdom is churning out lies and cover stories about a new beginning while increasing the police gentrification dragnet.

by Robert Norse

On June 17, I pulled out my battered gray overnight bag and began selecting clean shirts and socks without holes. I'd forgotten that where I was going, you didn't need any clean clothes. Jail provides its own orange jumpsuits.

It was time to take my eighth and final trip to San Francisco in the Alice-in-Wonderland merry-go-round that was the case of *State of California versus Robert Norse Kahn*. This was the notorious "Jail for Bagels" case that defied the odds and went to trial before an out-of-town hanging judge, Robert Barclay. Barclay, from tiny far-off Modoc County, was to retire immediately after doing the dirty work that even jaded local judges couldn't stomach.



Jailed for serving soup to the poor, Robert Norse (center) proves to be incorrigible, committing a new "SoupCrime" after release. Jan Spence photo

Barclay's job was to send me to the cooler. In so doing he sent a message to Food Not Bombs, the anti-hunger social change group which operates in more than 130 cities across North America: "Put away your cooking kettles. Stop attracting 'undesirables' to public places. Don't mix potatoes and protests. No more long lines of hungry poor people outside the Mayor's office. Hide out or get out."

The problem wasn't that the food was bad (there's never been a health complaint of sickness for Food Not Bombs). Judge

Barclay was saying: San Francisco may have changed its mayor — from unapologetic bigot and homeless-basher Frank Jordan to sweet-talking Willie Brown — but jail was still waiting for those presumptuous enough to cook up that volatile combination of food, freedom and facts that shamed government officials all the way from Congress's war-not-welfare lobby to the merchant-pleasing politicians of S.F. City Hall.

The game was still the same: share salads and soup and the cops will cuff you.

Fight the case in court, and you'll end up in an orange jump suit on the 7th floor jail at 850 Bryant St. Power is still where it always was and always will be: in the suites of the bosses, not in the streets with the many.

True, San Francisco voters had dumped District Attorney Arlo Smith, whose underlings had spent nearly \$100,000 fighting my case all the way up to the California Supreme Court. Both the new District Attorney, Terence Hallinan, and activist Berkeley lawyer David Beauvais had argued that the sentence should be set aside.

But on the streets, it was still business-as-usual. The round-em-up, drive-em-out Matrix program was still in full flower under the newly funded Operation Park. Homeless sleepers were being cited, their bedding and shopping carts taken and destroyed, Willie Brown's city officialdom churning out lies and cover stories about a new beginning while increasing the police gentrification dragnet.

Amnesty International, *The New York Times*, Food Information Action Network, and, for once, even the local media, were taking a look at the absurdity of jailing good Samaritans for sharing healthy food. Even the tabloids and the talk shows were nibbling. It was a good day to go to jail.

So I went. Inmates were astounded, guards were embarrassed, *The Washington Post*, Santa Cruz Community Television, and a *San Francisco Bay*

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