

Santa Cruz Sleepers Protest

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May 31, Superior Court Judge Samuel Stevens gave them part of what they wanted. He imposed harsh penalties for any one act of sleeping (at night only); any one act of storing, preparing or cooking food; and any one instance of having signs larger than 14 inches, which must be continually hand held. Violators are subject to five days in jail in a trial by judge and can face up to six months in a jury trial.

When asked where Santa Cruz's 500-1500 homeless people could sleep legally, Rotkin admitted, "nowhere." When asked the financial cost to the City of this unprecedented injunction — the cost of legal fees, court costs, secretaries, paralegals, copying, cost of service, telephone calls and the cost of enforcement — Mayor Mike Rotkin replied "Zero." In fact, the arrests and prosecution of large numbers of homeless people would be an enormous financial burden on Santa Cruz given the time and resources which will be plowed into this anti-homeless campaign by everyone from the cops on the beat to the judges in their chambers.

In early June, Rotkin's next move was to immediately announce a "city grounds closing law" which swiftly turned into an "internal regulation" that required neither public hearing, nor two readings as most laws do. Even Kennedy got nervous at this clearly unconstitutional and retaliatory decree, so it was quickly dropped. At the same council meeting Mayor Rotkin muzzled and ridiculed Hopkins as he tried to inform the council of renewed bluebelly blanket-snatching.

With more than 40 activists and homeless supporters enjoined by name from sleeping, sign-carrying, and cooking, the Vigilers sent out a call for legal help.

Protesting mother Sandra Roth secured the pro bono services of two Berkeley lawyer/activists — Larry Hildes and David Beauvais. "Bathrobespierre" Robert Norse, headed for jail for serving soup to the homeless in San Francisco, persuaded Kate Wells, a local lawyer on the edge of bankruptcy, to join the Dream Team. Their triple commitment: to fight the injunction, defend the sleepers against more than 250 sleepcrime tickets, and countersue the City of Santa Cruz in federal court to overturn the Sleeping Ban and stop police harassment.

In June, police resumed seizing bedding and blankets, began to take signs with the personal assistance of Mayor Rotkin and Councilmember Kennedy, and

hauled Pat Ring off to jail, the first of three increasingly brutal arrests.

Pat was bagged for having a sign that protruded three inches from a light post. He was then targeted in court by Bailiff "Thumbscrew" Thurber, who had Ring set upon by half a dozen other deputies near a court hearing being held to narrow or dissolve the injunction. The victim of a massive malicious assault, Pat was himself charged with six counts of assaulting police officers. Most recently, Mayor Rotkin had Pat hauled away by police after a foul-tongued, troll-buster-talking passerby began abusing the fiery-voiced protester.

One of Rotkin's original pretexts to crush the vigil by injunction was the alleged presence of rats, but protesters have only seen the two-legged variety skittering in and out of city offices. Another scare story was urine and feces. With no public bathrooms open at night in Santa Cruz, Rotkin has refused to open the nearby City Hall bathroom. Even so, demonstrators have been unusually cautious about essential human elimination activities.

But some protesters have been more pissed off than others. Irrepressible (some said "wingnut") homeless downtowner Joan Lee was jailed in early July for baptizing a patrol car with a yellow blessing when she could no longer legally hold her water. Earlier she had left a small pungent offering in front of the Mayor's office and another at the police station when police "confiscated" her bedding. Virtually none of the 60-plus blankets and sleeping bags stolen by police as part of their "freeze out the demonstration" tactic have been returned.

The City of Santa Cruz claims it spends a record \$8.1 million annually on homeless programs in a combination of public and private funding. This figure lumps together many programs not intended just for the homeless such as AFDC and drug rehabilitation programs. Yet little of this money actually makes it to the people for whom it is intended. Most is siphoned off into property, buildings and staff.

A particularly egregious example of this kind of siphoning off of funds is that of "Community House" — 10 donated trailers from Stanford that are replacing a free campground for 150-250 homeless people (the Coral St. Open Air Shelter). The cost of this project has been pegged at in excess of \$1.2 million. It will serve, at most, 40 people, and won't be opened until late fall at the earliest — complete with case workers, drug testing, a security

fence and \$600-plus monthly rental fees.

In the meantime, the only legal place for homeless people to sleep at night and pitch a tent during the day is a locked-off field, owned, ironically, by the Citizens Committee for the Homeless, the monopoly shelter provider which just got a \$150,000 bridge loan from the City Council to further this "trailers-not-trolls" project.

So, middle-class case workers will have more jobs amassing paperwork on "lifestyle choices" of the homeless. Well-paid non-homeless bureaucrats quantify and qualify, impose rules and intrude with questions, undertake studies and file grant requests. Meanwhile the real problems go begging. Funding to provider overseers rather than homeless people is irrational as social policy when it is well documented that the chief causes of homelessness are the high cost of housing and falling wages, neither of which is "a lifestyle choice".

The Downtown Association, a key player in the anti-homeless movement, is moving to kill the Farmer's Market to get rid of "bad elements." It recently expanded its wannabe police program, the "Hosts", and crushed a rebellion among more restive shopkeepers to make membership in the Downtown Business Assessment District voluntary.

The second week in July, Mayor Rotkin and the police pressured Pastor Marini of the Holy Cross Church to close down the backyard area he'd opened up to homeless sleepers — the only church to allow homeless people without vehicles a place to sleep. Less than 10 sleepers were reportedly still huddling in the pavilion area within the church after this latest outrage, which received rare coverage in the local *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (more colorfully known as the *Urinal* by caustic local wits).

Meanwhile, the City Hall Sleepers Protest doggedly continues. Homeless bashers come by daily and shout their epithets, usually "Get a job!"

With few real services for the homeless, and legal sleeping spaces for about 60 people for only eight months of the year, homeless individuals, not considered to be part of the protest yet having no place to go, have come to City Hall, where they find company, safety, and certainly inspiration from Dan, Mooncat, Nikki, Anthony, Sandy, Robert, Patrick, Sean, Bull, Richard, Gideon, Mad Mike the Wonderdog, Michelle, Devon, Starr, Redtop, Edward, Zen, Sunshine, James, Rafael, Pathfinder, and the rest of the City Hall Sleepers, who through sheer will power will not let the City Council sleep in peace until the law is changed.

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Rotkin