

Santa Cruz 'Sleep Protest' Faces New Police Attacks

by Robert Norse

The City of Santa Cruz has lost or deliberately eliminated sleeping spaces for homeless people over the last several months, and now has stepped up its enforcement of repressive anti-sleeping laws against its unsheltered citizens.

On August 31, Holy Cross Church announced it was closing its 40-person indoor pavilion, the last drop-in area for Santa Cruz's homeless people to sleep legally at night, in fact the last area of *any* size open to the poor at night. In early July, Mayor Mike Rotkin had shut down the Holy Cross Church outdoor field, which served twice as many.

Father Mike Marini, parish priest at Holy Cross, had allowed homeless people to sleep in sleeping bags in the church's field, even hiring security guards to ensure safety. After Mayor Rotkin heard *one* complaint from *one* neighbor, he informed Fr. Marini that he was in violation of the camping ban law and that the church had "no other option but to obey the law."

In March, the 150-space armory had closed. And last December, the Coral St. Open Air Shelter, which served 200-300 at its peak, was eliminated to provide "building room" for a \$1.3 million trailer project run by the Citizens Committee for the Homeless, a Fundraisers-R-Us-style group of poverty pimps (who then proceeded to keep the site vacant and locked off for the last nine months).

On August 30, Municipal Court Judge Tom Kelly upheld the Santa Cruz City Sleeping Ban, a law that makes two acts of sleeping outside within 48 hours a misdemeanor crime punishable by up to six months in jail and/or \$1000 fine. Judge Kelly's repressive decree means hundreds now face \$162 infraction tickets for their first act of sleeping or covering up with

blankets after 11 p.m. within the city limits, and jail for a second violation. Several hundred infraction ticket cases and half a dozen misdemeanor sleep-crimes will now go to trial.

On September 7, two new activists were arrested for misdemeanor sleep-crimes. Santa Cruz police increased their confiscations of property, with political displays, clothing, bedding and literature hauled away in two sweeps — much of it still in police custody along with 60-100 blankets.

On September 10, in plain view of cable television cameras, seven activists chained themselves to the podium and pews of the City Council chambers during the evening City Council meeting. As 40 supporters shouted "Homes Not Jails" and "We Demand the Right to Sleep at Night", Mayor Rotkin ordered police to clear the chambers, except for the anti-homeless smear-artist reporter from the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, Karen Clark.

Local labor activist David Minton Silva was thrown into a cement pillar several minutes after presenting 1800 signatures to the City Council demanding an end to the camping ban. Police Sgt. Andy Craine locked out many members of the public, including this writer. Craine is the same cop who threw the HIV-positive Silva out and sent him to the hospital. *Sentinel* reporter Clark was a witness to Craine's assault on Silva but declined to report it.

Four of the seven activists were held in jail for three days in what appeared to be gratuitous and punitive incarceration. All were charged with trespass and disrupting a public meeting. They face up to a \$2000 fine and one year in jail if convicted. The *San Jose Mercury News* declined to discuss the Sleeping Ban issue, instead smearing the activists as "in-your-face" exhibitionists.

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