

Santa Cruz Arrests

from page one

SJMN columnist Lee Quarnstrom described homeless protesters as "Human Garbage", "pathetic parasites", "self-anointed revolutionary bums", "crumb-bums who have no friends", and (last but not least) "flesh-eating bacteria."

Channel 35, on the other hand, followed the demonstration all the way from its "soup-crime" at the Town Clock to a march down the Pacific Avenue mall, to half an hour of sharp, incisive speeches, to the chaining of the protesters.

Mayor Rotkin denounced the demonstrators as "fascists" for interrupting the "democratic" process. Rotkin is the swing vote on the Sleeping Ban and has never agreed to have the issue on the agenda throughout his 12 years on the Council. On September 17, activists responded with a televised press conference of their own — an hour-long event that included activists, attorneys and academics. Inflated city expenditures were ridiculed and media distortions analyzed.

Meanwhile, Council members nominally sympathetic to the homeless (like Katherine Beiers and Celia Scott) refuse to put the Sleeping Ban up for a vote before the November election and decline to direct city staff to inquire into costs and savings for an amnesty on sleeping tickets.

With fall elections coming closer and closer, activists are looking to local labor activist David Minton Silva and feminist/environmentalist Kristin Anderson to replace Mayor Mike Rotkin and Vice Mayor Cynthia Matthews, two nveterate opponents of human rights for he poor.

At a recent Downtown Association forum, Matthews called for lengthy lock-ups for street people who run afoul of the anti-homeless Downtown Ordinances, which she and Rotkin voted in two years ago. These laws ban sitting near a shop,

peacefully asking for spare change at night, and setting up a protest table after dark. At the same forum, Rotkin favorably remarked that the city was planting flowers along fences, previously legal areas where homeless people could sit without being harassed by the merchant-funded "Hosts" and arrested by the police. Flower beds will henceforth replace the unsightly homeless people who formerly could legally sit down.

Rotkin himself was literally dunked and quietly pressured out of the Labor Day workers rally. The Peace and Freedom Party endorsed Silva and Anderson and called for an end to the Sleeping Ban. Unfortunately other powerful groups like SCAN, the NAACP and the Downtown Association have endorsed "revolving-door" establishment candidates, who have repeatedly voted against basic rights for the homeless.

Miguel Baideros, a high-profile vigil supporter, is an African-American activist on parole for a burglary charge that actually involved taking shelter from Sleeping Ban cops and trollbusters in an abandoned house in 1991. In early September, his parole was revoked on groundless charges and he was held in jail for 12 days.

A sympathizer in the Metro Transit Center policing force reported he was under increased pressure to harass and drive away homeless-looking people. Mayor Mike Rotkin is also head of the Transit Board. Young people face the renewed threat of a youth curfew (the county got one this spring), as would-be City Council candidates call for "taking back our streets!" — blaming the current economic crisis on drugs and bums.

Meanwhile, the city has witnessed a much ballyhooed fundraising effort to respond to the "homelessness crisis" through united action by merchants, activists, politicians and service-providers to establish an emergency youth sleeping shelter. The proposed shelter site, we now learn, is located far out of town, will have

a warrant-checking program, and will focus on the usual Cadillac-services-for-a-few rather than emergency shelter for young people who need it. Naturally this means more jobs for contractors and middle-class bureaucrats, razzle-dazzle feel-good publicity for businesses and office seekers, and no significant new services for the majority of homeless people.

But the high-profile protest in City Hall and the continued nightly vigil in front of it has had a tangible impact. The morning after the protest, Officer Evelith attacked the vigil anew with sleeping tickets, a ticket for displaying signs and a new "sit-on-the-wall, pay-a-fine" citation. Within days, police on horseback with dogs reportedly swept the riverbanks and the forests, destroying campsites and confiscating property. The word spread among some old-timers in the homeless community that the raids were punishment for the high-profile September 10th protest.

On the positive side, word is out that Councilmember Scott Kennedy has taken action. Kennedy calls himself an opponent of the Sleeping Ban but he has never taken action to annul or amend it. Now, it seems, he has drawn up a plan to open up an alternate sleeping area. For many, this is one step forward, two steps backward, since it took the homeless two years to win the right to put up tents and keep them up during the day at the Coral St. Open Air shelter (which Kennedy himself helped to close last December). Details are sketchy, but reports indicate that those without shelter will have to disappear at dawn under Kennedy's plan.

"Zen" Hearst is now in jail, after having been taken into custody on a misdemeanor sleep-crime ticket. Anthony Palanjo, a steadfast sleeper when others fled to the bushes, has left for the north. Back in town: old-timers Scott, Shannon, and their one-legged dog Weasel; "Spittin' Kitten", who recently bared her breasts to protest the police seizure of a "Hosts" T-shirt by police (she gave her

shirt to the man whose shirt was confiscated); and, finally, Rainbow Life (or Loudmouth Leith, as we used to call him), an old-timer who went to jail in 1990 as part of the 8 1/2 month-long Post Office Homeless Vigil.

Each Saturday at 2 p.m., supporters march from the Town Clock through the downtown to support the sleepers. Each Thursday at 6 p.m., activists meet at What Is Art (2044 North Pacific Avenue) to plan new, more creative attacks on the Sleeping Ban. And every night in front of City Hall, as the weather turns colder, homeless vigilers illegally cover up with blankets in front of City Hall to show the city and the world that they will not leave until their job is done.

For more information, call: HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) (408) 423-HUFF; Revolutionary Coalition (408) 421-9250.

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