

Public is Silenced in Santa Cruz

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A MOCKERY OF DEMOCRACY

Audience members continued to voice their frustration, saying: "Thanks a lot Rotkin!" "... makes a mockery of democracy." "Democracy, Santa Cruz style." "Where's the chains and locks?" someone asked in reference to the September 10th council meeting in which seven people chained themselves to the banisters to protest the sleeping ban.

Homeless activist Sherry Conable, obviously upset, said: "I observed a very unusual process. Usually when something is brought forth on the agenda, the first thing that happens is the mayor invites members of the public to come forward and make whatever comments they want to make. She (Mayor Cynthia Matthews) went by that part of the process and allowed Mr. Rotkin to present a five minute dissertation on his objections to what was being discussed.

"It was the most embarrassing manipulation of the democratic process I've ever

seen in city council chambers. They had clearly figured out exactly what they could do so that this would not have to be publicly discussed. It brought the council completely apart. Scott (Kennedy) left before there was a formal recess. Celia left before there was a formal recess because she's so upset by this manipulation of the democratic process ..."

"THEY SQUASHED ALL DEBATE"

"They squashed all debate," Conable charged. "They figured out a technicality of process and how votes are taken so that they could manipulate this so no further discussion would be had except that Mr. Rotkin got to make his five minute speech full of the usual errors and misinterpretations that he continues to put in front of the public of Santa Cruz and gets away with.

"And I hope that if nothing else the media noticed that Councilmember Scott had done her homework and had finally disavowed this long upheld myth that Santa Cruz as a city spends more money

per capita (on the homeless) than any other city in the United States. We're actually low down on the list in terms of how many dollars we spend.

"I hope that Mr. Rotkin and anyone else who continues to hold that up will quit it, because they're obviously wrong

"A shelter crisis threatens the life and safety, to say nothing of the dignity and rights of hundreds of people, but what is that next to the ego of Rotkin's agenda? This agenda will tolerate no public debate, even from councilmembers who have often been his allies."

— Activist Robert Norse

and they're manipulating public perception in order to get support for their own prejudice and their own misinformation."

While Vice-Mayor Scott's proposals were only hypothetical, in the past a shelter emergency has twice been declared in

Santa Cruz. First in 1990, and again in 1995, the city council had declared a shelter crisis already exists. To look only at persons in the ISSP and Armory shelters as comprising the population seeking shelter is vastly misleading. Couples, persons with animals, teenage boys, those with respiratory conditions, those who despise an impersonal, conveyor-belt style approach to shelter, intoxicated individuals, and even working homeless persons whose schedule does not fit the rigid hours of the armory, are all not counted, but their shelter needs are as real as anyone's.

"THE MOST BLATANT SILENCING OF THE PUBLIC"

Another unusual occurrence took place at the 7:00 p.m. council session. The first 30 minutes are designated for oral communications from the public on items not appearing on the agenda. Councilmember Katherine Beiers got up from her council seat and took a place in line with the public to speak to her fellow council members as a member of the public.

"Earlier today, I'm sad to say, I wit-

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