Santa Cruz Silences the Public

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nessed the most blatant silencing of the public," Beiers lamented. "I am embarrassed by it and obviously upset by it."

" I know for sure ... the reason people didn't want a debate is because they didn't want to hear from 'those people'", Beiers charged, referring to councilmember Michael Hernandez's remarks earlier that day about 'those people'.

Beiers told her fellow elected officials, "If you make choices on who you want to hear from and who you don't want to hear from, how do you ever choose other than silencing the repressed, the unimpressed, or those who don't impress you?" Beiers urged the council to reschedule the item and discuss it fully.

Homeless activist Robert Norse spoke next. "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... If Hernandez, Campbell, Rotkin, Matthews choose to close down democratic options at city council, we must do what other peoples are doing and reclaim those rights. In Chiapas and Jalisco women and men are rejecting, at great personal risk, the political regime which has deserted them. We must take our civil rights struggle to the streets."

Councilmember Scott Kennedy also left his seat, stood in line with the public, and spoke at the mike as a citizen. "This afternoon, in my mind, a majority of councilmembers used the parliamentary maneuver not only to end a debate they thought had gone on too long, but to prevent a debate before it had a chance to start.... It was disappointing. It was contemptuous towards the public. And it was disrespectful to other councilmembers. There is a moral dilemma.... And the dilemma is what happens when and if there is a lack of shelter. I wish we could talk about it at council."

The editorial in the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* the next day called Kennedy, Beiers, and Scott "sore losers" but failed to mention a word about the shelter crisis the councilmembers were addressing. The oft-repeated phrase that abolishing or limiting the camping ban would result in the homeless "camping everywhere" was repeated by the *Sentinel* in spite of the fact neither Vice-Mayor Scott's proposal nor homeless activists have ever advocated such a position. It is a human right to sleep *somewhere,* and that is the issue — not the fabrication that people will then sleep everywhere. The editorial demonstrates the *Sentinel's* willingness to needlessly arouse fears in the housed population about perceived threats by the homeless.

Contacted a few days afterwards, City Attorney John Barisone (who had held the tabling action legal at the council meeting) confirmed that no similar tabling had happened within his term in the 1990s in cases involving a divided council; he added that tabling of noncontroversial matters was routine. Councilmember Beiers, after studying *Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure* reported that the rules clearly state that a tabling action is never meant to silence minority opinion.

Those wishing to register their public comment are encouraged to call Santa Cruz City Council at (408) 429-3550 and leave a voice mail message.

As to a public debate on the camping ban issue, perhaps Hell must first freeze over.