

"GO TO SLEEP, GO TO JAIL"

After a series of votes won by the Rotkin coterie, protesters made their move. They quietly rose wrapped in blankets, entered the sacred City Council rotunda and stood there silently behind councilmembers holding up signs that said "Go to Sleep, Go to Jail." Mayor Matthews nervously demanded that the silent poor return to their seats, tremulously complaining that they were disrupting the meeting with their noiseless protest. When she received no response, she peevishly recessed the meeting.

Organizers then moved outside council chambers to carry on the demonstration. Donna Deiss and Gayle Landress, soft-spoken organizers of the Riverview Tenants Association, told of their recent court victory against a retaliatory eviction for union organizing and pledged their support in a homeless-tenant alliance.

Formerly homeless security guard Cy Hussein denounced discrimination by downtown businesses against the poor. Twelve-year-old Deon Lemaster, a frequently homeless youth poet, spoke of his experiences on the street.

Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs, under the leadership of Pat Ring, served a vegetarian stew that warmed bellies and spirits for another round with the cold-hearted council. Ring, a Headwaters and Santa Cruz homeless activist, splits his time between jails in Arcata and Santa Cruz and faces many misdemeanor charges in February for peaceful protest at City Hall.

Back in the City Council, an eloquent quartet of new speakers addressed the issues, only to have Matthews cut them off. Celine Pascale, writer for Z magazine, spoke on the criminalization of poverty; Bonnie Schell on the impact of the sleeping ban on those labeled "mentally ill;" Sadie Reynolds on the effects of the ban on the young; and Dianne Alynd on the misuse of criminal law to "solve" social problems. Local TV media took more interest and interviewed them outside.

Dan Hopkins, the father of the City Hall Sleepers Vigil, who earns money by recycling cans, was among dozens not allowed to speak. "No time," was Mayor Matthews' excuse. Hopkins had planned to offer Matthews or Rotkin \$20 a month for the rest of their lives if they would agree to be homeless for one week in disguise and find out how it felt to be awakened by the police spotlight and boot heel.

Guerrilla grubgiver Keith McHenry interviewed protesters for San Francisco Liberation Radio's "Voices of Rebellion" show (97.3 FM, 5-7 p.m. each Tuesday). The weather held until nightfall when more winter storms drove the protesters under the eaves of City Hall where they shared food, arranged solidarity for court dates, and brooded boisterously on the future.

On a related issue, the Citizens Committee for the Homeless (CCH) felt the growing heat from homeless activists without and liberal sympathizers within at its January 24th board meeting. On the motion of board member Becky Johnson, with a brace of outspoken homeless locals in tow, CCH set up a committee to work rapidly to reopen the Coral St. Open Air Shelter, a timely revival of the Safe Haven plan. Castigated for a year as poverty pimps and promise-breakers who had closed down Coral St. in the name of the \$2 million Community House project, CCH took the first tentative steps to rectify their betrayal. Johnson also prompted the board to formally support the council dissenters who had unsuccessfully moved to establish a Winter Shelter Emergency.

And in the courts, Dan Hopkins will be taking three of his sleepcrime tickets up the appeals ladder as judges and attorneys sort out the more than 370 tickets given out at the City Hall Sleepers Protest. James Basso will appear before Judge "Kangaroo" Kelly in the first misdemeanor sleepcrime trial in Santa Cruz history in mid-February. Pat Ring and Sandra Roth will be fighting misdemeanor contempt of court citations under the Rotkin Injunction. And dozens of homeless people will be appearing on the court calendar with \$162 tickets and \$300 failure-to-appear fines for the crime of closing their eyes to sleep at night.

February 1997