

Santa Cruz Activists Fight Sleeping Ban

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noses of the landlords.

The California Homeless Civil Rights Action Network's alert system has been used to support protests in Palo Alto, San Jose, Mountain View, and Santa Barbara against Sit/Lie laws; protests in Santa Cruz and Glendale against Sleeping Bans; a Los Angeles fight against a panhandling law; a Santa Monica crusade to reopen showers for the homeless; and support for a Buena Park Baptist convicted of housing the homeless in his church. Fair Share Network coordinator Sandy Brown links current welfare cuts, the struggles of poor women, and the right to sleep at night.

Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom organizers are discussing a daytime sleep-out at the County courthouse to challenge Judge Kelly's recent ruling that the nighttime Sleeping Ban is constitutional because "homeless people can sleep during the day." Linda Lemaster's *Housing Now!* in Santa Cruz has already

announced support for such a sleep-out.

Hardened veterans of the struggle against the Sleeping Ban have turned to a fifth path: organizing to get the City's law on the November, 1998 ballot through the initiative process. Citizens Committee for the Homeless secretary Becky Johnson, California Homeless Civil Rights Action Network point person Laura Tucker, Green Party activist David Silva, and community watchdog Bob Lamonica are spearheading the effort to get 5000 signatures from registered voters in the City.

In three weeks last September, The Revolutionary Coalition gathered 1800 petitions against the entire Camping Ban, of which the Sleeping Ban is a subsection. At the next City Council meeting, police sent Silva flying through the chamber doors into a marble pillar as he tried to present those petitions to the city clerk in the midst of the Chaingang protest.

This latest initiative effort will also target the ban on bedding, which prohibits

covering up with blankets after 11 p.m. on public property in the city. Organizers are trying to fashion as broad-based an initiative effort as possible, while retaining a clear dedication to the basic moral principle that sleep is not an economic privilege but a fundamental human right.

Ironically, the sixth path to protest is intensified anti-homeless laws and practices pushed by the Santa Cruz potentates. Being homeless and under the age of 16 becomes a crime after 11 p.m. throughout Santa Cruz County in early September when the teen curfew removes the City of Santa Cruz as a sanctuary for the young. Police pressure is up downtown with daily harassment for sitting on the sidewalk or planters, leaning against lampposts, or simply gathering publicly.

City workers are removing public benches at the behest of businesses. Police routinely harass street musicians. The Downtown Business Association is threatening to intensify its blatantly bogus "give to charities not sparechangers" program with a more militant "Phase 2," concocted

behind closed doors. Young workers who linger on the street after leaving their late-night jobs are being targeted. Repression may spark rebellion.

Santa Cruz's only local emergency shelter provider, the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program, candidly admits it regularly turns away people, leaving them without any legal place to sleep. Welfare cuts are striking bone. Santa Cruz County and neighboring cities are escalating complementary criminalizations of the homeless. In Santa Cruz, shelter is provided for fewer than 5% of the homeless population, and nothing has been done to alleviate the welfare decapitation crisis.

Statewide, Gov. Pete Wilson has vetoed critical funds for winter use of National Guard Armories for emergency shelter. With all these forces in play, Santa Cruz's long struggle for homeless justice may bark loudly enough to awaken the slumbering politicians before the lethal bite of an El Nino winter puts some of the homeless to sleep permanently.