

Massive Homeless Deportation in Eureka

"My mom has asthma, emphysema, and her kidneys are failing. When all this started happening, I felt like I was a prisoner, that I was more of a number than a person. It didn't feel like America, that I was trapped in some other country."

by Robert Norse

Protest marches, legal injunctions, prayer meetings, and plans for resistance marked the final weeks of preparation as residents and supporters steeled themselves for a threatened County-engineered police sweep of hundreds of homeless people camped on the South Spit Jetty south of Eureka.

On September 2, Humboldt County Health Officer Ann Lindsay ordered the road to South Spit Jetty gated and guarded and set an eviction deadline of October 2 for 300-plus homeless people encamped there. She also ordered all property not removed by that date confiscated.

Lindsay's pretext for this expulsion of hundreds of people from their only home was her declaration of a "public health emergency." Though no one was sick when she issued her order in September, Lindsay found a *causus belli* in eight confirmed cases in April and May of what she labeled Shigella dysentery. (Later Lindsay ballooned that figure to 20.)

Citing unsafe health conditions because of lack of sanitation and washing water, Lindsay declared an immediate



A homeless resident of South Spit Jetty, where 300 homeless people face eviction.

emergency — even though these same conditions had been standard for years, ostentatiously ignored by Humboldt County officials in spite of pleas by religious and health workers. Humboldt County and the City of Eureka, nestled near the northwestern corner of the state, have 1000 to 1500 homeless people.

Doctor Wendy Ring, the regular medical provider at South Spit, rejected Lindsay's "public health emergency" in a sworn four-page declaration to Superior Court Judge Buffington on September 25. Why, if there were really such an epidemic, asked Ring, did the County refuse to provide funds to fill a water tank for hand-

washing in May? Why did County Health officials express no alarm at eight cases of Shigella dysentery in Eureka in February?

Nancy Dervin, a Christian minister with Love In Action, who built a 24-by-32-foot church out on South Spit Jetty and served the community there for three years, swore in a declaration to the Superior Court on September 25 that she wrote a grant in 1996 to get water, garbage, and toilets for the Jetty, but Humboldt County blocked it. "I was going to try again this year," she continued, "but the Health Department advised me that they would once again block it. (These services) could have been provid-

ed for 2 1/2 years (\$1700 a month) with the \$55,000 the County has committed to remove people from what little bit of security they now have." The same Humboldt Area Foundation that refused to fund a grant for toilets in 1995 is paying for social workers this year to dress up the homeless deportation.

Dervin states that Lindsay's press release claiming that St. Joseph's, Catholic Charities, and Salvation Army were given funding to help soften the Jetty eviction was refuted by direct calls to those agencies. Eureka Police Chief Milsapp, she adds, told her: "I won't let

the splinter effect

by Randy Fingland

kaleidoscopic
media diffusion
keeps the focus
of energy dissipated
so the fires
can burn on
in the hungry
bellies
of poor children

another century
about to lapse
without extending
the guarantee
of the right
to be alive
to everyone
on the planet