

# Activists Fight Santa Cruz Sleeping Ban

Sleep may still be a crime in Santa Cruz, but public impatience over the absurdity is growing.

by Robert Norse

The Santa Cruz Sleeping and Blanket Bans criminalize sleeping outside or inside vehicles and covering up with blankets outside from 11 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. They first appeared on the books in November, 1978 — a horrific hybrid of a 1976 emergency ordinance requiring written permission from the owner to camp or sleep on unimproved private property with an older law against sleeping in your vehicle or in beaches and parks at night.

The grotesque result was a vastly more repressive ban that criminalized



hundreds of poor people each night for the next 20 years, merely for the nightly act of sleeping outdoors or in vehicles or covering up with blankets (in addition to criminalizing virtually all camping).

Harsh penalties of up to six months in jail and \$1000 fines for a second “sleep-crime” within 48 hours were explicitly added to the original \$162 infraction fines in one of freshman “socialist-femi-

nist” City Councilmember Mike Rotkin’s now-notorious votes. Nearby Watsonville and UCSC also passed copycat laws, mandating “go to sleep, go to jail.”

In 1995, the Santa Cruz City Council, under slightly-more-liberal Mayor Katherine Beiers, passed a provision permitting church parking lots to allow up to three vehicles of sleepers per night to