

Not Even the Crumbs of Justice

The 'new and improved' Santa Cruz City Council sells out the rights of the poor all over again

As civil rights attorney Kate Wells told the City Council: *"If this was Rosa Parks, she'd be allowed to sit in the next to the last seat from the back of the bus."*

by Becky Johnson

It was over before it began. Sleeping would not be legalized in Santa Cruz, not by the so-called "new and improved" City Council majority elected in November, 1998, when Keith Sugar, Christopher Krohn, and Tim Fitzmaurice came on board. Most sadly, the Sleeping Ban would not be ended by Mayor Katherine Beiers who, up until now, enjoyed a reputation as one who cares about the plight of homeless people.

Few homeless people attended the crowded first reading of the proposed amendments to the Santa Cruz Camping Ordinance to tweak it into a kinder, gentler law. No late-night bus to the armory was provided to enable homeless people to attend the council meeting on February 23, as it had been last December 8th.

"The slaves have to be on the plantation at night or get a Sleeping Ban ticket,"



Being homeless in Santa Cruz now means 10 sleepless and uninsulated hours each and every night of the year, including Christmas.

Alena Smith photo

observed Robert Norse of Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom about the arrangement. Students Against The Sleeping Ban brought signs, speakers and youthful energy. These students, having picked up the cause of Mumia Abu Jamal

along with the cause of decriminalizing poverty, are bringing a new force into this long, tired debate.

As has happened at every public hearing thus far, dozens of impassioned, thoughtful and experienced members of

the public turned out, and with few exceptions, they spoke with one voice: End this law which makes it a crime to sleep. It is inhumane. It is a human rights violation. It is unjust. You have the power to do this. End this law!

Hard-core representatives of front-line anti-homeless groups actually stood in line, spoke, and then complained about how hard it was to speak out. These organizations — the Downtown Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Neighbors Association — have rarely spoken against the Sleeping Ban in public.

Peter Eberle, executive director of the Downtown Association, said he feared the effects of letting homeless people sleep at night in vehicles or in public. "How comfortable would a parent be, sending their child off to school knowing there's people sleeping in vehicles?" he asked. "What is the possibility of kidnapping?"

This fear-mongering, typical of this merchant organization, has generated nearly 100 e-mails, faxes, and letters which blame homeless people for everything from littering to kidnapping — almost everything *except* sleeping or keeping warm with blankets.