

Santa Cruz Mayor Banishes Peaceful Protest, Jails Activist

by Becky Johnson

On Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz, merchants count receipts from the holiday shopping season, and take inventory. Outside the Pacific Trading Company (PTC), people walk past a fenced-off planter where once guitarists sat and strummed and young folks lounged.

But last June, under pressure from the PTC, the City of Santa Cruz paid several thousand dollars to move the metal railing about eight inches to the outside edge to eliminate seating. Move along, Rosa Parks. You can't sit here anymore.

Inside Borders Books, half a block away, former *Street Spirit* vendor coordinator John Maurer was told he couldn't read there any more because doing so without buying was "basically stealing." Just outside Borders, a new change machine has been installed. Since a City ordinance prohibits sitting on the sidewalk or asking for spare change within 50 feet of such a machine, the City has effectively "cleaned up" the entire storefront area of kids and homeless people who used to gather there. Most had no better place to go. And every night, the cops scope out homeless people in vehicles or outdoors for illegal sleeping, banned from 11 p.m. until 8:30 a.m.

The economy has not been kind to the merchants or to homeless people. Santa Cruz County has experienced a steep rise in homelessness from 2002 to 2003, a jump from 8,558 experiencing homelessness each year to a whopping 11,898 for 2003. Shelters, such as Santa Cruz Homeless Services Center, have had 10 percent cutbacks in their budgets and are struggling to hold the line providing for existing services. They cannot expand to

On January 4, HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) contacted Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy and asked him to place repeal of the sleeping ban and blanket ban on the January 13th City Council agenda.

MAYOR REFUSES TO HELP HOMELESS

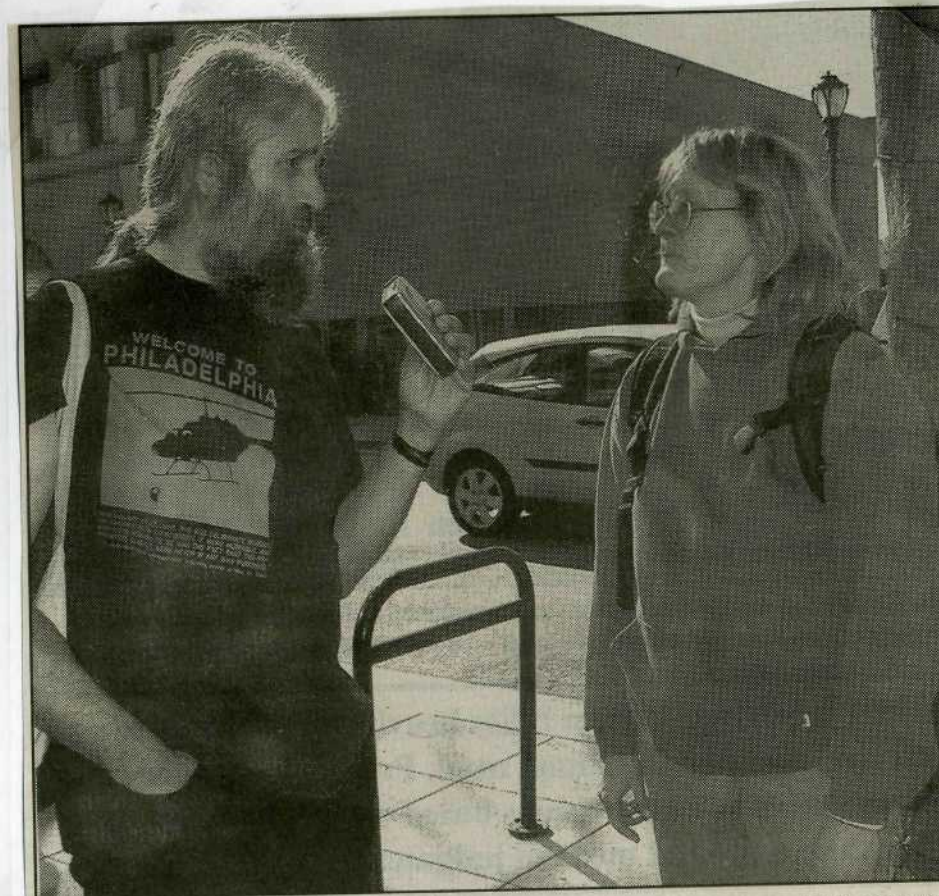
Mayor Kennedy declined, saying "it [repeal of the Sleeping Ban] might well, in fact, contribute to greater vulnerability and risk." Kennedy added, "I have no reason to believe that repeal of the Sleeping Ban would be supported by a majority of the City Council." How does allowing homeless people to sleep at night and to keep warm with blankets make them more vulnerable? What about their risk of exhaustion and hypothermia?

On January 13, HUFF held a press conference in front of City Hall on the criminalization of homelessness nationwide and the Santa Cruz Sleeping Ban in particular. The ban, passed in 1978 and supported by the mayor and the entire City Council, menaces the physical safety of homeless people and makes them second-class citizens by subjecting them to arbitrary interrogation, detention, search, arrest, and exclusion.

At the same time as the City Council was being confronted with the issue of the Sleeping Ban, Santa Cruz was the host for several out-of-town writers and speakers at the One Dance Conference, and some of these speakers joined local activists in calling for a repeal of the ban.

Conference speakers included social scientist and internationally known writer Michael Parenti, author and editor Mickey Z, and Canadian student activist Yvonne Engler. Outspoken master chef, Joseph Schultz, provided hot vegan soup for the participants. The Conference took place while Mayor Kennedy's City Council met

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Robert Norse (at left) interviews a Santa Cruz resident about homeless issues. Norse, an activist and journalist, was ordered arrested by Mayor Kennedy for speaking out against the Sleeping Ban at a City Council meeting.

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