

Liberal Mayor Breaks Promise to Santa Cruz Homeless

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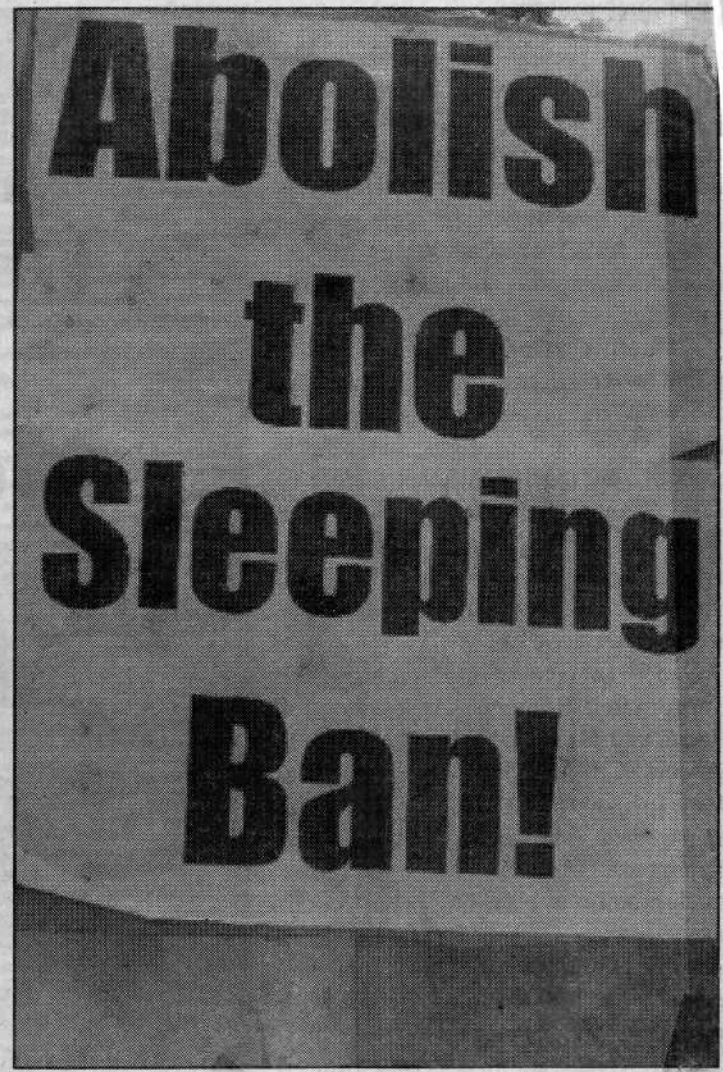
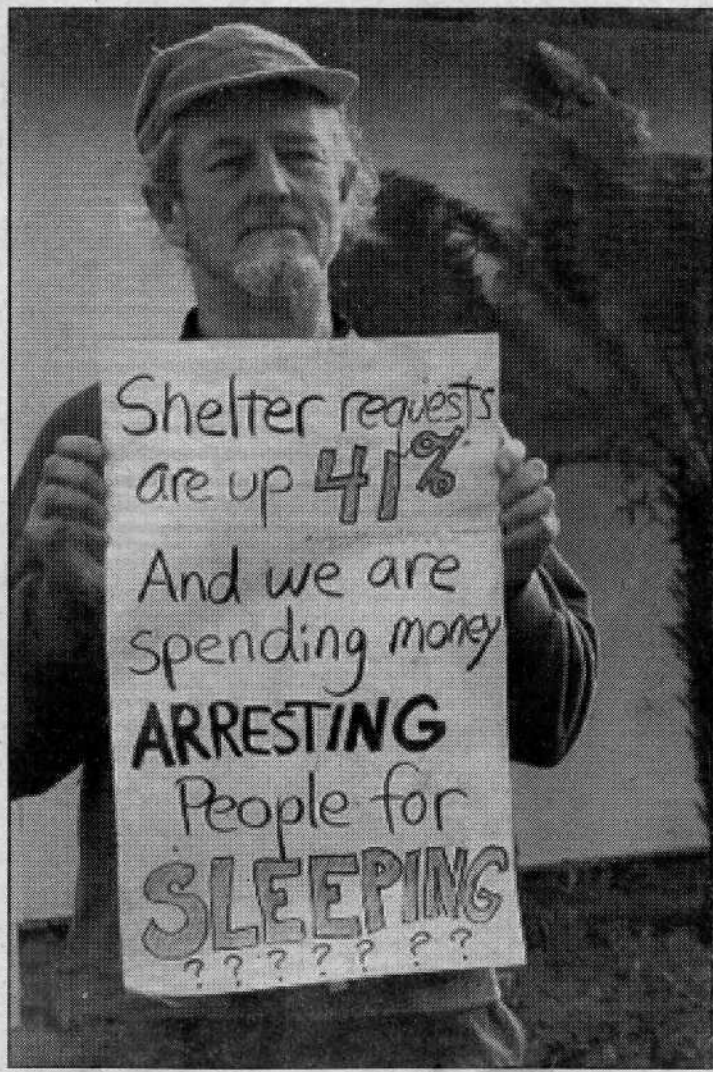
Liberal on foreign policy, yet reactionary on the rights of the poor at home, a Santa Cruz mayor breaks his public pledge to allow discussion of the Bring America Home Act.

by Becky Johnson

How liberal are the liberals on social justice issues? Well, it depends on how close to home they are. Mayor Scott Kennedy of Santa Cruz bills himself as a liberal. He is the cofounder of the Resource Center for Nonviolence. As a member of the Fellowship for Reconciliation, he advocates for the rights of Palestinians living halfway around the world, and he is a strong opponent of the war in Iraq.

As a member of the City Council, Kennedy voted to waive parade fees for gay pride parades, supported Free Radio Santa Cruz, and called for a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal. But Kennedy also has both a recent and a long-standing history of ignoring and even endorsing daily abuses against homeless people, while muzzling homeless activists.

In 1994, Kennedy publicly supported the anti-homeless Downtown Ordinances which ratified selective police enforcement practices against "undesirables" by making a whole range of innocent behaviors criminal. Asking for money or food after dark, setting up a political table next to a building or playing music next to a wall — all were made criminal offenses. In a subsequent police riot where one woman miscarried and another man had his ribs broken, Kennedy justified the police violence.



Signs of the times. Activists decry Santa Cruz's draconian sleeping ban, which criminalizes sleeping outside. Photos by Bradley

In the years since, Kennedy has allied with developers, merchants, and the powerful Seaside Company. He supported a youth curfew, critically weakened and then killed the Citizens Police Review Board, and backed banning the parking of vehicles from midnight to 6 a.m. without "a permit," a measure aimed at homeless vehicle dwellers.

In 2003, Kennedy supported a harsh stiffening of the Downtown Ordinances

which directly criminalized sitting on 95 percent of city sidewalks, banned street performing with a donation can on 80 percent of the sidewalks, and added the uniquely repressive and unconstitutional "Move Along Every Hour" law. Superior Court Judge Michael Barton ruled in court on March 19 that the move-along law is unconstitutional because it discriminates against non-commercial speech. [See "Victory for Free Speech in Santa Cruz," *Street Spirit* April 2004.]

HARASSMENT OF ACTIVISTS

In January 2004, Kennedy interrupted repeatedly and personally ordered the arrest of Robert Norse (one of the writers of this article). Angered at a peaceful silent protest at City Council in response to his exclusion of Sleeping Ban reform from the agenda, Kennedy repeatedly threatened with ejection a score of critics silently holding signs.