

No Homeless Parking: New Police Attack on the Poor

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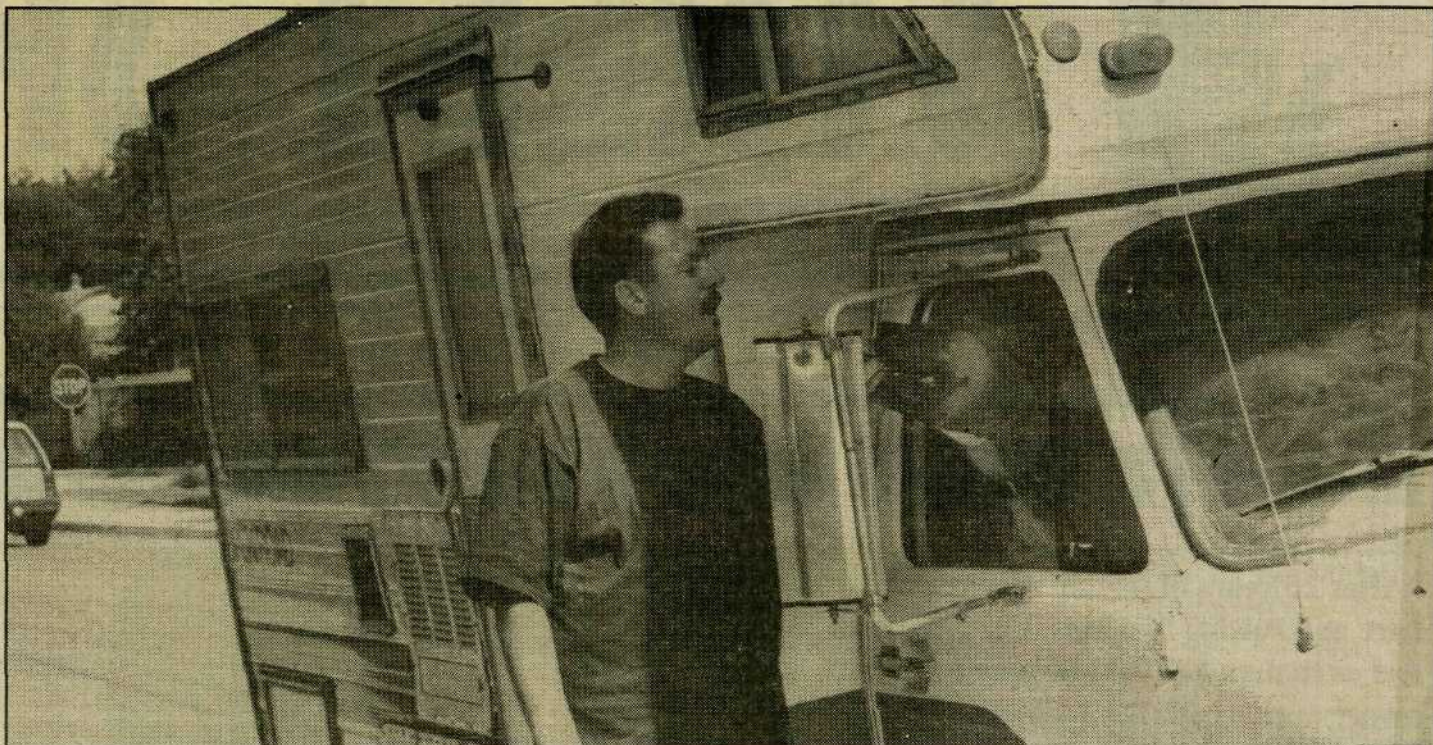
by Robert Norse

Old, calculating, legal minds, eager to gentrify their cities and gate their communities, have found a new tool to "move along" the many made homeless by rising rents, a crashing economy, and a shredded safety net: "no parking" laws. Administrative ordinances that restrict or prohibit parking have become the focus of legal struggle in Santa Barbara and protest in Santa Cruz.

Most homeless people do not have vehicles, but a significant minority do. Homeless families in Santa Barbara, under the leadership of Nancy McCradie, formed Homes on Wheels in the 1990s. San Francisco's Vehicularly Housed Residents Association unsuccessfully sought federal funding for its own car park. The Santa Cruz 2000 census counted 30 percent of its homeless residents in vehicles.

For conservative neighborhood residential and business associations, the visible presence of old VW buses on their streets is a provocation and an outrage, and many cities have acted to ban or criminalize living in vehicles.

Each year, the National Coalition for the Homeless issues its "Meanest Cities" report. In it are detailed the latest "legal"



Vehicles can be homes for homeless people and pets. But Santa Cruz officials are attempting to drive them away.

Lydia Gans

incursions on the rights of homeless people state-by-state and city-by-city. High on the list of cruel absurdities are sleeping bans which criminalize the basic human need to sleep; but in so doing, give police a universal tool for interrogating, questioning, harassing, and ultimately deporting any homeless person they choose.

The Bush-Ashcroft national policy of suspending civil liberties has actually been routine, institutionalized local policy towards the homeless for many years.

Local sleeping and camping bans have been vulnerable to legal, religious, and

political challenges, and have been challenged in many cities as outrageous, unreasonable, and unconstitutional. They also prompt a baffled response from ordinary citizens, who understand what politicians don't: just how cruel, unenforceable, and counter-intuitive such bans are.

The ugly, oppressive face of these laws and the negative public reaction they provoke does not stop city councils from making still more of them. Local police enforce them. Though it's clearly documented that no city has adequate shelter for more than a small fraction of its home-

less population, sleeping bans in California have not yet been struck down as unconstitutional, as they have in a few other states. Municipal judges in Austin, Texas, and Portland, Oregon, have struck down local sleeping and camping bans. "No enforcement without a shelter bed" settlements are in place in Atlanta, Georgia, and Miami, Florida.