

More Martial Law Measures for Santa Cruz?

Speech to the Community and Board of Supervisors by Robert Norse 2-10-15, revised 4-21-15

I can understand that Sheriff Hart is made uncomfortable by the 4 demands of Sin Barras (1) End the privatization of California Medical Group "let 'em die" policies; (2) Accept responsibility for unnatural deaths; implement grand jury recommendations demanding expansion of mental health; (3) abolish use of solitary confinement, abolition of the restraint chair ("torture chair"); (4) Cancel the 24.6 million planned expansion of the Round Tree Expansion Center in Watsonville.& the recommendations of the civil Grand Jury.

I can understand the exposure of overcrowded, unsafe and abusive conditions in the jail may make a police-and-deputy compliant Board of Supervisors politically nervous.

But is removing large swaths of area from public access really a fair, constitutional, or safe way to deal with dissent that disturbs authorities? Will we, the public, allow this to happen. Again.

I don't think the public should expect this Board to be sympathetic to the community's rights. It is composed of individuals who in the past have remained silent, directly surrendered, or led the crackdown against those protesting abuses.

In 2006-7 then Councilmember Ryan Coonerty went so far as to criminalize sitting in your own car legally parked in a city parking lot, even after you've paid for the privilege. Public assembly in what amounts to 10 square blocks downtown is now illegal. This paralleled the unsuccessful struggle of the community Market Drum Circle to survive in its traditional place adjacent to the Farmer's Market at Cathcart and Cedar.

In 2007 Supervisor, then SCPD PR man, Zack Friend, smeared a vulnerable group of protesters to discredit and destroy a peaceful Sleeping Ban protest at City Hall, the Homies for the Homeless protest.

In 2010, this Board sat silently by while deputies broke up PeaceCamp2010 in front of the Courthouse. It then funded a D.A. who dragged 40 homeless Latinos, a disabled elderly woman (Linda Lemaster), the attorney who started the protest, and other activists into court seeking penalties of up to a year in jail. Attorney Ed Frey was sentenced to 6 months; Gary Johnson, the next year was sentenced to two years for lying on a bench outside the courthouse with a "Sleep is Not a crime" sign.

In 2011, this Board allowed Susan Mauriello to remove the First Amendment at night from the area around the courthouse and county building with her own "no trespassing" edict—similar to what Sheriff Hart is now proposing. The shameful signs forbidding peaceful assembly after dark still threaten the public

I can understand why Sheriff Hart prefers the expand and punish process that protects the jobs and profits of hundreds of deputies, lawyers, judges and prison construction industry nabobs.

What I don't really understand is why the community permits this steady erosion of rights and access to public space to go on. How many dollars is Hart wasting on the Drug War and the War Against the Homeless..a futile, dangerous, and costly war?

And now we are to permit him to shut down public access to the already inaccessible dungeon across the street?

Where are the stats other than anecdotes and special pleading that justify this "security need"? Obviously Supervisors need to have staff research this, reach out to groups impacted by this including prisoners, prison support groups, friend and relatives of those in jail, surrounding neighbors, and others whose rights will be summarily removed with a flourish of Hart's pen.

A decent sense of modest suggests the Board provide a little better camouflage and cover. Say with some real security concerns, some real stats, an independent analysis of why this seizure and retraction of public space is necessary. I'd think even Sheriff Hart would be a tad embarrassed for what is pretty clearly a bald and blatant attack on peaceful protest. Perhaps he can station the Bearcat armored personnel carrier out front which was recently rushed through the Santa Cruz City Council. For security. To reassure him. There is no threat. This is an aggressive attack on whistleblowers as anger grows stronger against uncorrected abuses in the jail.

We, the public, need to return to the real issues: Conditions inside the jail that have resulted in deaths since the selling off of medical treatment to private agencies. The waste of public money. The failure of the punitive system. The unanswered concerns of the Grand Jury and the activists. And the cries of those inside.