

Community Solutions, Bureaucratic Repression

Speech to the Santa Cruz Community and City Council by Robert Norse 7-27-10

Solutions to the summer shelter crisis in Santa Cruz? They have become obvious: campgrounds, safe zones with sanitary facilities, unused parking lots at night, modified laws that penalize irresponsible camping not survival sleeping, instructions to the police not to check for shelter space before harassing sleepers.

PeaceCamp2010 shows that homeless people themselves can self-regulate a nighttime sleeping area. They can maintain it through the day as well in a highly-trafficked zone in front of the County Building. All at a fraction of the cost of one week's rent of the Armory Winter Shelter.

City Attorney Barisone, City Manager Bernal, and the Rotkin-Coonerty City Council would rather spend money destroying trees and closing public spaces in their continuing attack on the Drum Circle as they did yesterday.

We get new laws to make the Sleeping Ban a misdemeanor crime on the fourth infraction. New cops to punish those who sit down on the sidewalk downtown. New laws to punish those seeking lodging if they have no ID. Rushed laws to ignore the pressing need for affordable housing and rent control, but instead impose new rental inspection fees on landlords as part of their sweetheart deals with UCSC.

Instead of investigating attacks on homeless women—like Officer Azua's reported March assault on Synthia Kennedy—city bureaucrats spend \$50-100,000 dragging Miguel de Leon and Anna Richardson through court for sleeping tickets. The expensive trial resumes next month. City police bust activists for showing movies to the poor under the bridge, go after cheap safe and fun community parades, and prosecute homeless advocates for singing political songs on Pacific Avenue.

We need stop begging for common sense for a Council that has sold out to a “Not-in-my-back-yard” agenda, and support those who are actually doing the day to day work of struggling to create real solutions in the face of indifference and repression. Support PeaceCamp2010 and those struggling to open up public space, public process, and restore the public conscience.