

# Escalating Public Safety Crisis...for the Homeless

The Task Farce Report? Tired old mantras attacking homeless people as drug abusers, bad campers, bums, and nuisance criminals. Homeless people themselves face the real public safety threat---police theft of their property, discrimination in businesses, stepped up harassment in public places, and an absurd and abusive set of new laws added to the ancient insult of the Sleeping Ban.

Real crimes like rape, assault, white-collar fraud, and police abuse didn't make the TF's cut. Has anyone looked into Officer Vazquez' "smash-him-to-the-sidewalk" treatment of Richard Hardy in handcuffs last spring? Or the gun-happy Officer Hernandez's drawing and pointing a gun at a woman half his weight for carrying a plate of food out of the Salvation Army last Tuesday? Instead Deputy Chief Clark's darkly warns of a "homeless crime wave" But he doesn't detail what the "crimes" are. Sleeping? sitting near a building? lighting up a cigarette? huddling under a bridge? or just looking scary to a nervous NIMBY? Let's avoid a crisis of compassion and just call 'em all "criminals".

Councilmember Comstock's Take Over Santa Cruz, The Clean-'Em-Out Team, the Dump the Down and Out Downtown Association, and of course Robinson's Ravagers—the Santa Cruz NIMBY Neighbors have got their prejudices and fears all wrapped up with a bow. Bryant's Bully-the -Browbeaten Task Force had no representation from the groups targeted, and what appeared to be a prefabricated agenda cooked up by gentrification gumshoes eager to cleanse the City of poor travelers, rebellious youths, upstart minorities, and visible homeless folks.

The real "Public Safety" crisis involves the safety of the most vulnerable population--much of it disabled, some elderly, some with families & children. The woefully inadequate shelter, housing, rents, and job situation is ignored with homeless people instead rebranded as "lazy", "alcoholic", "drug-addicted", or "mentally ill". And

The entire neo-fascist fantasy of a "Public Safety" crisis for the community is simply a Big Lie. The Task Farce has had 6 months of bi-weekly hearings and hasn't got the stats to prove it.

The use of ancient "Reefer Madness" and Drug War hysteria, vastly inflating the dangers of improperly discarded needles needs to be countered with a real campaign to provide Inhalation and Injection Centers, expanded needle exchange, a complete abolition of the toxic drug laws, and the redirection of the money dumped on courts, jails, and other bureaucrats to provide voluntary drug treatment centers and other socially necessary reforms. A bloated police force won't help. Particularly one that comes running every time a nervous neighbor sees a homeless recycler.

Will Council be deluded enough to buy into this medieval "jail the visible poor" strategy? Could be? Jury trials should cost on \$10,000 a shot. Jurors, of course, can always vote "not guilty" on deeper moral grounds.. Reckless political class war has its costs.

A year after needlemania, we still have no more Sharps Containers than before, and no city needle exchange. It's up to us. Document abuses. Post them on you-tube. Spread the word. As winter descends and the risks increase, public dangers for those outside grow. The community needs to act.

Support existing homeless encampments by providing trash pick-ups, sanitation services, blankets, tents, and other protective gear. Equip homeless people with video-ready cell-phones to document the midnight wake-ups and darkening climate of violence they face.

Fresno friends of the homeless fund portapotties. Palo Alto attorneys are filing a lawsuit against the "no sleeping in your vehicle" law. The answers lie not with the homeless-o-phobic Task Farce, the co-opted City Council, the police, or the judicial juggernaut—but as always with us. Let's get back to identifying real crimes, meeting real needs, and addressing real abuses. Courage, like fear, is also contagious. Let's get to work restoring rights and sanity in this community.