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City Council

Alert Santa Cruz Takes on City Hall

Bob Johnson

The first little flap has broken out between the progressives on the Santa Cruz City Council and a recently formed organization that is working to throw them out of office.

Last week the Council voted to distribute 20,000 copies of a pamphlet describing life in Santa Cruz after an atom bomb falls on San Francisco.

The opposition activists in Alert Santa Cruz have blasted that decision as a politically partisan use of City powers. Alert Chair Sandra Mock told the *Express*, "You can rest assured Alert Santa Cruz will seek an injunction against sending out the pamphlet."

In the weeks after their June 3 victory against rent control, a group of landlords and realtors began meeting to discuss a possible recall of the Council majority. Their ranks were swelled by opponents of the Livable Streets for the Downtown and others who wanted to see a change at city hall.

After weeks of discussions, the group decided not to pursue a recall. But those discussions led to the birth of Alert Santa Cruz, with the goal of taking power from the Council majority of Mike Rotkin, Bruce Van Allen, John Laird and Mardi Wormhoudt at the November 1983 election.

Local landlord Doug Austin, who led three campaigns against rent control, is on the Alert board. Realtor Bill Sweringen, who organized the petition drive that forced repeal of the just cause eviction law, serves as the Community Relations chair. Mock has been active in civil liberties and women's politics but she also was concerned with the Council's restrictions on property rights.

The SC High School community's opposition to the Livable Streets for the Downtown plan brought PTA President Joanne Martin into the local political arena and she too is on the Alert board.

That board also includes a number of the better known conservative activists in town. Republican Central Committee member Timothy Morgan, longtime Chamber of Commerce pol Manny Shaffer and former aid to Supervisor Pat Liberty, Katy Sears-Williams, are all part of the seven member Board of Directors.

These people describe themselves as "moderates."

In its newsletter, Alert attacks the Council for "its

polarizing doctrinaire philosophies and rhetoric, its blatant abuse of the democratic process, its divisive tactics and its brazen payoffs to its neighborhood activists support factions."

The attack on the distribution of the pamphlet on nuclear war is the first direct confrontation between the Council majority and the recently organized opposition group.

Radiation contamination, food and water shortages and the chaos of 600,000 refugees from the Bay Area descending on Santa Cruz are described in the pamphlet, which is titled *A 'Limited' Nuclear Attack: Santa Cruz 1982*. The pamphlet clearly suggests that nuclear war cannot be survived and provides the addresses of numerous governmental agencies and peace organizations, encouraging people to write for more information or to express an opinion on the arms race.

Earlier this year, the City Council turned down the federal government's request to make plans to absorb hundreds of thousands of nuclear refugees from the Bay Area.

Instead, the Council moved toward a way of fulfilling its civil defense obligation in a manner similar to Cambridge, Massachusetts, Marin County and other localities: to issue a pamphlet with detailed local information that leads to the conclusion that there is no defense for the civilian population in a nuclear war.

Alert Santa Cruz claims distribution of the pamphlet is a partisan use of City power. The Nuclear Freeze Initiative, Proposition 12 on the November 2 state ballot, is one of the more controversial issues in the next election. The pamphlet may or may not be distributed before that election.

In a letter of protest to the Council, Alert claims the pamphlet amounts to an endorsement of Proposition 12. "This pamphlet," Alert writes, "includes a statement by the Santa Cruz City Council in favor of the dismantling of nuclear arms and the renunciation of their use by countries with such weapons." The letter goes on to point out that most of the peace organizations listed in the pamphlet are actively supporting the nuclear freeze.

Alert Chair Sandra Mock told the *Express* the key issue is the use of City money to pay for the pamphlet. Although all the work on the project has been volunteered by concerned people from the community, the Council voted to spend around \$1100 to cover the costs of materials and postage. Mock said she personally is "adamantly opposed against the buildup of arms" and will probably vote for the Freeze herself, but considers the use of taxpayer money to distribute the pamphlet a dangerous precedent.

Alert's failure to join the public discussions that led to the decision to distribute the pamphlet could undermine the credibility of the criticism.

On September 14 a draft of the pamphlet was presented to the Council by Mardi Wormhoudt. Councilmembers Spiro Mellis, John Mahaney and Joe Ghio vehemently objected to sending it out without first holding a public hearing to allow for comments, criticisms and changes.

That hearing was held on September 29 and an overflow crowd came to discuss the issue. But Mellis was on vacation in Greece, and Ghio and Mahaney decided to not attend the hearing they had demanded.

No one from Alert Santa Cruz spoke at the public hearing. Instead, the group issued a letter eight days later protesting the results of the hearing.