

Doesn't Like Labels

Rotkin Takes SC Mayor's Post

By MARK BERGSTROM

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As expected, the Santa Cruz City Council elected Michael Rotkin the city's first-ever socialist mayor to the cheers and applause of supporters Tuesday night.

The City Council chamber was packed with persons anticipating Rotkin's election by his colleagues, just as it was two weeks ago when John Laird and Mardi Wormhoudt were sworn in to create the first-ever liberal majority on the City Council.

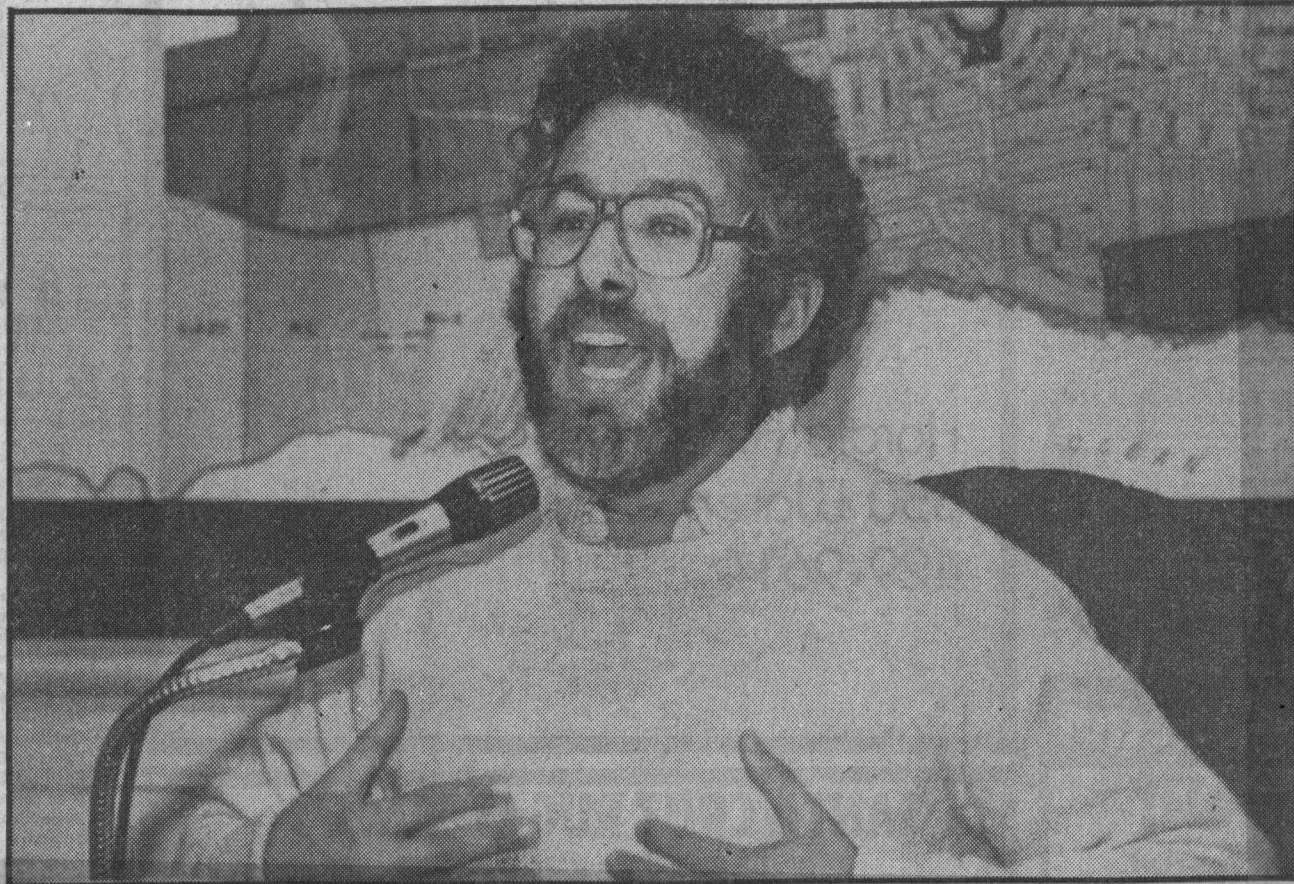
The Nov. 3 elections of Laird and Wormhoudt virtually assured that Rotkin would be elected mayor. The fourth member of the liberal majority, Bruce Van Allen, was elected vice mayor Tuesday night.

Both Rotkin and Van Allen were elected on 5-2 votes, with conservative Spiro Mellis crossing over.

Mellis had also been nominated for mayor, but declined, saying "I don't know whether it's because I don't want this term to start on a 4-3 vote that I'm being realistic or conciliatory, but I'm going to support Mike Rotkin."

Outgoing Mayor Joe Ghio and Councilmember John Mahaney, the other two conservatives, voted against both Rotkin and Van Allen on "political" grounds.

In accepting the post, Rotkin, who has served on the council for 2½ years, reaffirmed his allegiance to the Westside



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

SC Mayor Michael Rotkin said the key to his philosophy is to "involve people in local decisions."

Neighbors, whom he said talked him into running for the council.

He credited the Westside Neighbors in leading what has become a citywide movement to overcome political labels. The neighborhood organization, Rotkin said, is made up of "conservatives, liberals, Republicans, Democrats and, yes, even a few of us socialists."

Noting that his expected election as first socialist mayor had been widely publicized, Rotkin said, "I simply don't feel comfortable with labels in our society."

Rotkin, a lecturer at UCSC, said he has never considered himself a liberal "because they give away money and don't involve people (in the political process) nor a conservative because "the private market is no longer a free market because even in Santa Cruz its controlled by multinational corporations."

He said he comes closest to a socialist "related to the democratic socialists at the turn of the century."

The key feature of his philosophy, he said, is "involving people in local decisions; I think that's absolutely critical." He said he is not an advocate of "big brother."

Rotkin said he also considers himself a feminist, believing that problems long suffered by women, including physical

abuse and job and economic discrimination, should be aired in the public arena.

Repeating what Laird and Wormhoudt had said in their acceptance speeches two weeks earlier, Rotkin said he hopes the people of Santa Cruz "will judge me and the council on how we respond to the issues" and not according to political labels.

The shift in philosophy on the City Council has been viewed with concern by city conservatives, primarily on the issues of rent control and social programs vs. capital improvements.

Both subjects were touched upon at Tuesday's council meeting.

Van Allen announced he wishes to bring before the council in December issues affecting renters. He said he shares the concerns of renters, who comprise more than half the city's population, about arbitrary rent increases and evictions.

And, on one what is expected to be many 4-3 votes, the new majority voted to approve construction drawings for a grant-funded Raymond-Uhden Street recreational facility, but rejected companion plans for the installation of water main replacements in the area. Rotkin urged that the federal Housing and Community Development funds should go to housing and neighborhood rehabilitation, not water department projects.