

Lockheed worker can't collect from protesters

By NANCY BARR
STAFF WRITER

A Santa Cruz Municipal Court Judge has ruled against a Lockheed Missile and Space Co. employee who sought to recover lost wages from the organizers of a protest at the Lockheed plant.

Steven Beck had filed a small claims suit against five men who helped organize the protest last fall in which hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside Lockheed's Bonny Doon plant and many of them sat in the roadway, blocking the entrance to the plant. Lockheed officials, knowing the protest was planned, closed the plant and laid off all employees for several days for their own safety, plant director Vernon Smith said at a court hearing on Beck's suit.

Judge Richard McAdams issued a brief ruling this week in favor of the defendants, saying the layoffs were the fault of Lockheed management, not the protesters.

"Even if this were not the case, under federal and state law, tort liability cannot be imposed upon non-violent political expression," the judge

wrote. "The activities of the individual defendants in this case were limited to such non-violent political expression."

Defendant Jason Schwartz said today he was glad the judge also ruled on the broader issue of the right to demonstrate, even though he could have decided the case simply on the fact that the protesters themselves were not responsible for the layoffs.

"It should be clear to all we have the legal and moral right to dissent in this country," Schwartz said.

Had the judge ruled in favor of Beck, Schwartz said, Beck himself and other union members working at Lockheed could eventually have been hurt. Under the arguments presented by Beck and Smith, Schwartz said, the union could effectively be prevented from demonstrating in a dispute with Lockheed management.

Defendant Mark Mumper said he felt the judge had made it clear in his questioning at the court hearing almost two weeks ago that Beck should first have sought compensation from his employer for the wages lost during the layoff.