

City Workers Blast Santa Cruz' Employment Policies, Practices

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The city of Santa Cruz is a miserly, sex-discriminating and unconcerned employer whose policies and practices have shattered its workers' morale.

Those bitter charges were leveled at City Manager David Koester and Personnel Director Kent Rice during an lunch-hour meeting Wednesday attended by some 75 workers in the Civic Auditorium.

The Santa Cruz City Council came under heavy attack, as well, with several workers accusing the council of being more concerned about social programs than about the welfare of the workers.

One worker said, "The council was talking recently about buying the county's interest in the Laurel Community Center. If the city has that kind of money to spend for a place like that, the council

should think about us. I'm getting hungry, myself. They should watch where they spend the money. Instead of all these programs they should give to the employees for a change."

A police officer said, "Some of them are coming up for re-election next year, and I wouldn't vote for any of them."

The reference here was to the fact that the terms of Councilmembers Charlotte Melville, Carole DePalma, Joe Ghio and John Mahaney are expiring and that elections for these council seats will be next March.

The meeting was set by Koester because, as he expressed it, "I don't meet with you very often directly, and I wanted to hear about your concerns first-hand rather than second-hand."

Koester and Rice heard often that the workers are shocked they have been offered only a 1 percent

increase in fringe benefits this year.

Speaker after speaker inveighed against the wage freeze imposed by the state as a condition for providing some \$485,000 in bail-out money to the city following the Proposition 13 shrinkage of property tax revenues.

Koester agreed with them it is unfair for government workers to be denied cost of living increases when soaring inflation is ripping ever bigger chunks out of their income.

But, Koester stressed, it would have been virtually impossible politically for the council to have turned down the \$485,000 and then give the workers the raises they deserve. He indicated it would have been a decision involving \$1 million: one that said "no" to \$485,000 in bail-out money and "yes" to raises amounting to some \$500,000.

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Speakers demanded to know, however, why the city wasn't offering to increase fringe benefits by 7 or 8 percent. All claimed this is legal, and Koester concurred in the legality.

Rice tried vainly to keep the talk away from the specifics of

negotiations now in progress on a fringe benefit package, but he got nowhere even when he pleaded at one point, "The press is here."

One worker said, "If you are a single person without a dependent, the fringe benefit increase doesn't apply to you. That's inequitable."

Another woman denounced sex discrimination on the subject of pay.

She elaborated, "If you are a Typist Clerk 1, the city pays \$629 per month. To qualify for the job you must be a high school graduate and type 40 words per minute, at least.

"But a beginning custodian is paid \$746 per month and the only qualification is a driver's

license. A woman comes in with skills and is paid less than a man without skills is paid. I'm not saying the salary for the man is too high; I'm saying the salary paid to women is too low. It didn't say on my application form that I have to be married and have someone support me so I can hold a job here."

There was a long burst of applause following the statement.

Rice said the city does recognize the inequity and he pointed out that last year the city gave persons in these low positions a 4 percent special increase along with the regular increase given others. He said, further, the city has a program for "moving workers in this category upward."

The salary philosophy leading to lower pay for women is "the philosophy of keeping women barefooted and pregnant in the kitchen," the worker said later.

Speakers warned that workers are leaving the city to get better paying jobs, workers the city has put many thousands of dollars worth of training into.

A police officer denounced the council's apparent greater concern for the street people than its workers and said, "Maybe next time someone gets robbed or beat up they should call a hippie."

Koester strongly defended the council, pointing out that councilmembers must set many priorities and make difficult decisions. He contended the low morale is a product of Proposition 13 and the salary limitation, and he held to that theme although many workers kept saying "No, no, it's been going on for years."

It's time the city begins to care about its workers, the workers said, and the council, too.

"We're citizens; the council is supposed to represent us, too," they insisted.

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