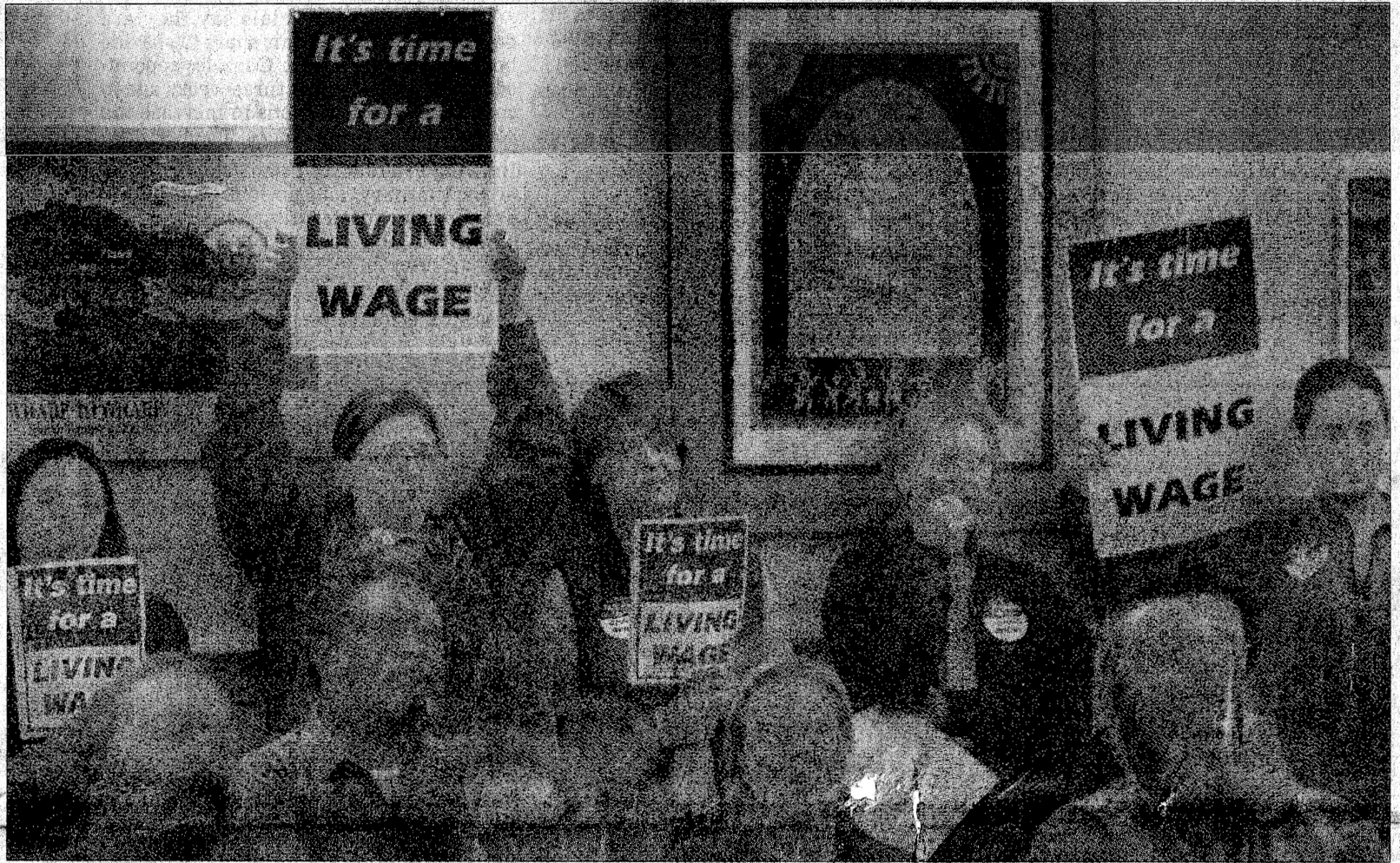


SC city workers win top living wage in U.S.

Council hikes pay of lowest earners to \$12 per hour



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Supporters of Santa Cruz's living-wage ordinance fill the Council Chamber Tuesday night. Councilman Christopher Krohn called the evening a 'love-in.'

Living Wage

By **HEATHER BOERNER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Tuesday night, Santa Cruz became the leader in the national movement to provide city workers with a living wage, with the City Council unanimously passing the highest city wage in the country and requiring service contractors and social service providers to do the same.

The living-wage ordinance passed amid standing ovations, declarations that the wage will be a catalyst for change in the county and across the country, and expressions of gratitude by the council members, union members, workers and activists. Noting the warm, nearly ecstatic feelings in the packed room, Councilman Christopher Krohn dubbed the evening a "love-in."

Vice Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice, who helped craft the ordinance as part of the council living-wage subcommittee, took a less giddy tone.

"This ordinance will go into effect right around

Thanksgiving and I think there's something symbolic about that," he said. "We are finally, in our own meager way, bringing all people to the table. This will be a good Thanksgiving."

The city's lowest-paid workers will earn \$11 per hour with benefits and \$12 per hour without benefits. The lowest paid workers now earn \$7 per hour.

Several members of the Coalition for a Living Wage, the group that has advocated the wage increase for two years, said what may be even more remarkable is that, not only has there been no organized opposition to the living wage, but many of the city's social service providers were so sure that the ordinance would pass that in recent weeks they raised their pay scale to the new wage in anticipation.

"We had a meeting with our executive board in September and established higher pay and a new salary schedule for our employees," said Willy Elliott-McCrea, executive director of the Second

Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. "We've been saying consistently for years that this is important. The living wage will be difficult for us but we believe it's the right thing to do."

The city's staff estimates the new law will cost the city \$535,000 to \$585,000 more per year. About 50 municipalities across the country have living-wage laws, including Cambridge, Mass., which pays its lowest-wage workers \$10 per hour, and Kankakee, Ill., which pays a small number of its low-wage employees \$11.42 per hour. San Francisco recently approved a living wage of \$10 per hour.

Only one city job classification — facilities attendant at Loudon Nelson Community Center and Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium — is below \$11 per hour now; about six people fall into that category. The Coalition for a Living Wage estimates the new laws will affect those employees, about 200 social

Please see **LIVING WAGE** on **BACK PAGE**