

Opinion

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A ^{mayors} year under a socialist mayor

MICHAEL ROTKIN has become known more for being a socialist mayor rather than the Santa Cruz mayor these past 12 months, and the city has withstood that philosophical leadership change without a significant impact.

There have been some notable political battles fought over the past year, but as usual, probably 90 percent of the city's business was carried on through unanimous votes.

Rotkin tonight is expected to turn over the gavel to Bruce Van Allen, another "socialist-feminist," and along with other "liberal-progressives" that make up a 4-3 council majority, the cause of "democratic socialism" is expected to be pushed along in 1983.

Just what has it meant to have a socialist mayor and a progressive council majority? Overall, not too much to date, but the purposes of these factions could intensify if they get three of the four seats in next November's City Council election.

Under Rotkin, whose staff members, city employees and even opponents acknowledge has done his homework on municipal affairs and knows that of which he speaks, some changes in direction have taken place.

Primary among those would be the city's increase in allocations to social programs. In 1981-82, for instance, Santa Cruz put out about \$178,000 for such activities. This fiscal year, the first in which the socialists have had the council majority, that figure increased 58 percent to \$280,000. It's not a significant sum in a \$40 million city operations budget, but the jump on a percentage basis is worth taking note.

There have been some significant setbacks for the socialists, too. The key one was the defeat of rent control that was on the ballot last June for the third time. It has

lost by a larger margin each time. Also, for the first time in city history, petitioners forced the council to rescind an ordinance it had passed — a proposed tenant eviction law.

Rotkin early this year said he wanted more data before a decision is made on a proposed Zayante dam. A cooperative venture on water needs was put in order to include several water agency representatives. The tactic may be to delay the proposal to death, but no significant data has come about in the past year to assist in a decision being made on that critical resource.

The Rotkins and Van Allens say their type of socialism is no more than heightened "democratic participation" in the governmental processes — in other words, getting more people involved. There's little problem with that, as long as the "people" aren't only special interest groups wishing to run the city according to their narrow views rather than concentrating on the betterment of the municipality as a whole.

The impact of the socialistic philosophy is likely to take more of a hold when the council majority makes appointments to commissions, committees and boards in December.

However, its impression might really be felt if three socialists are elected to the council in November 1983. That would give them a 5-2 advantage on the council, sufficient to penetrate the administration that has more than bare majority protection in the City Charter.

So for city operations, a year under socialists (progressives, feminists, liberals, etc.) hasn't been much different from the days of conservative council majorities — i.e. win a few, lose a few.

There's merit in getting people involved in their government. But in Santa Cruz at least it still would be incorrect to take that to mean those people want government to take a more dominant role in their lives.