

# SC Rent Control Proposal Is Blasted

By BILL NEUBAUER  
Sentinel Staff Writer

The rent control measure proposed by the Santa Cruz City Council's liberal majority was blasted Wednesday as "a simplistic, even simple-minded approach" to solving the complex housing problems within the municipality.

Paul Niebanck, a UCSC professor, a national authority on urban housing and a former rent-control advocate here, also castigated the liberal majority for having used a process "that has been clumsy, hasty and marginally undemocratic" to develop the rent control measure to go to the voters June 8.

Niebanck derided the public hearing held by the City Council on Feb. 2 in the Civic Auditorium, saying: "It was not a hearing but a rent control rally, a

rally sponsored by and legitimized by the council, with banners, cups for donations, street theater. The councilmembers were giving away the power we in the city gave to them."

But Vice Mayor Bruce Van Allen told the same Chamber of Commerce audience at Pasatiempo Inn Wednesday that unless the city enacts rent control and a strong housing program "we face social and economic disaster."

He added: "For more than half the people here, the question is how to survive. Santa Cruz was once affordable. Now even people who were born here and grew up here are unable to afford to buy a house or even to rent. Santa Cruz was once a friendly place. Now it is saying to many that they are not welcome. Now it is a place that is

SEE BACK PAGE

## RENT CONTROL DEBATE

FROM PAGE 1

terror-ridden because housing is unaffordable and rents keep going up. We are becoming an alienated community. To heal our community, we must stabilize rents. We cannot say to more than half our population: sorry, but you are the losers."

The Niebanck - Van Allen discussion was attended by some 100 members and interested persons at the chamber's economic concerns committee meeting chaired by Elizabeth Penaat. Attending were Councilmembers Mardi Wormhoudt and John Laird, who help form the council's liberal majority in a political alliance with Van Allen and Mayor Michael Rotkin.

Van Allen virtually begged the CofC committee to drop its opposition to rent control. The polarization of the community will intensify if there is no rent control, he said, and he added:

"You will see more overcrowding, accelerated deterioration, the end of rational discussions, rent strikes. With rent control we have a way of approaching part of the housing problem that is fair. We need it, you need it. If we work together with rent stabilization I think we can save Santa Cruz."

Van Allen claimed the business community has a direct benefit to gain from rent control, pointing out it is now difficult to bring workers here because they cannot afford the housing prices or rentals.

But Niebanck accused the liberal council faction of in effect bypassing the mandate it has to do something significant to solve housing problems.

"We elected a council majority with an avowed, sincere desire to do something about housing. Why, then, a council initiative rather than a housing program to do something about the many complex problems there are?"

Niebanck said there is a full "housing agenda" the council has not ad-

ressed, and he elaborated:

"You can enforce the housing code. There are two sides to the rental question: price and quality. The enforcement is long overdue.

"You can consider cooperative housing, you can consider the residual amounts of vacant land in the city and build to higher density. You could bite the bullet and say you will upzone and have higher density. You could think ahead to the post-Greenbelt days—what will you do with the land?"

Niebanck said he sees no basis for the rent control proposal, no analysis. He charged the City Council bypassed the Housing Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission and perhaps the city attorney both in developing it and even in determining if rent control is necessary.

Now, he said, all action on housing will be stopped until voters in June decide the fate of the rent control measure.

Van Allen said rent control is a necessary first step because housing, like health care, is essential. But he stressed is committed to a comprehensive housing program, including publicly owned housing, cooperative housing developed with perhaps "a huge bond issue."

Van Allen several times referred to his personal commitment to more public ownership of housing. His would have preferred the City Council to have adopted rent control outright, "but we were threatened by a referendum election and put it on the ballot ourselves."

Van Allen admitted during the question period that the council has made no survey of the actual rent increases said to have been given tenants citywide.

He scoffed the notion that many homes now rented would go up for sale if rent control passes, asking: "To whom are they going to sell? I would love it if the city would buy all the houses."