

Over 20 percent of homeless residents in Chicago are employed, with many holding a college degree

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The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) annual study released in July found that an astonishing number of homeless people in Chicago are employed and many have a college education. Using the most current census data, the CCH found that 86,324 Chicago residents were homeless in 2017. Of this number, 13,929 or 21 percent of homeless adults over 18 have a job, and 28 percent hold an associate's or bachelor's degree.

The total number of homeless people in Chicago has risen significantly over the past several years. CCH found a total of 80,384 Chicago residents were homeless in 2016, and 82,212 in 2015. The 2017 numbers also reveal that the number of employed homeless residents has increased over the past two years, from 14 percent in 2015.

The numbers blow apart the myth that by working hard and earning a college degree, workers in the US can prosper under capitalism. Furthermore, it tears apart the political fiction fed to the US working class that the Democratic Party is more aligned with its interests than its counterpart in the Republican Party.

How has the number of employed homeless workers increased in the US's third-largest city, while the media and main political parties have declared that the US economy has been supposedly "recovering" since the official end of the economic recession, which began with the stock market crash of 2008?

As in other states, crushing student loan debt in the state of Illinois has led to extreme financial insecurity for many college graduates in the state. The average student loan debt load for a college graduate in the state was more than \$29,000 in 2017, rising 63 percent over a decade from 2006.

The cost of housing in the city of Chicago is significantly higher than for the entire state of Illinois,

which ranks 19th-highest for housing costs among all 50 states in the US. In Chicago and the five counties surrounding the city proper, a worker must earn \$23.31 per hour during a 40-hour workweek to afford a 2-bedroom apartment for \$1,212 per month, or 30 percent of total monthly income. For the state, the affordable housing wage is \$20.85 per hour for a 40-hour workweek to afford a 2-bedroom unit at \$1,084 per month.

Although the minimum wage for the city of Chicago increased to \$13 per hour in July, this is far below the hourly wage needed for a full-time worker to be able to afford housing in the city and surrounding area. Many jobs in Chicago still pay well below the official estimates of the city's living wage. Even if the minimum wage were to be increased to \$15 per hour, as advocated by "progressive" Democratic Party officials in the city, housing would remain unaffordable for large sections of the city's working class.

Chicago's lack of affordable units is a mounting crisis. Between 2012 and 2017, the number of affordable housing units in the city has steadily declined, leaving about two-thirds of the city with a net loss of affordable units. The majority of these areas have seen decreases anywhere from five to more than ten percent.

The Democrats, and their political lackeys in the trade unions, bear the responsibility for the housing crisis in the city of Chicago. In 2000, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) applied to join the Clinton administration's Moving-to-Work Program (MTW), aimed at forcing low-income workers out of affordable rental units in order to reduce costs. Under Democratic Mayor Richard M. Daley, the CHA further engaged in housing privatization schemes, turning public housing into "mixed-use" developments which were targeted toward higher-income renters with the aim of transferring public funds to private

developers.

Under Democratic President Barack Obama, the requirement imposed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that public housing authorities like CHA give out 90 percent of affordable housing vouchers was eliminated, giving it free rein to continue diverting funds from its low-income housing voucher program—which subsidized a portion of low-income families’ rent—into its own financial schemes to build up reserves and spend down debt payments, all things that were allowed under the MTW Program.

Over the years, the CHA’s financial manipulation has created a crisis with long wait lists for vouchers—some families have waited for decades—and an overall population decline as lower-income residents leave the city for more affordable options outside of the area. This process was especially accelerated under Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

While politicians such as former corporate lawyer and Chicago’s recently inaugurated Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, posture as advocates of the expansion of affordable housing and rent control, they cannot be believed. Reviewing the development of the affordable housing crisis in Chicago, it is plain to see that as Democrats they will carry out the interests of the ruling capitalist class and have nothing to offer to workers struggling with or on the brink of homelessness.

The attitude of the ruling class towards the crisis of homelessness in the United States—the richest country in the world and home to more billionaires than any nation on earth—was summed up in an interview that President Donald Trump gave with Fox News host Tucker Carlson during his visit to Japan for the G20 Summit last week.

Trump declared homelessness to be “disgraceful” and that he was “looking at it very seriously,” singling out Los Angeles and San Francisco. He went on to disparage victims of homelessness and blame them for their own fate, stating that “Some of them have mental problems and don’t even know that they’re living that way. They can’t do that. We cannot ruin our cities...We may intercede. We may do something to get the whole thing cleaned up.”

Los Angeles and San Francisco are two of the most socially unequal cities not just in the United States, but in the world. On Monday, Uber cofounder Garrett Camp purchased a Beverly Hills mansion with his partner for \$75.2 million, widely believed to be the largest sale ever

of a home in the history of the ultra-rich neighborhood. Camp’s over \$4 billion personal fortune comes from the exploitation of the labor of a worldwide network of low-wage contract drivers for the ridesharing company, who organized a global strike to protest their low wages and abysmal working conditions earlier this year.

Trump’s fascistic threats to “intercede” to “clean up” cities’ homeless populations are a warning to the working class. If such plans are carried out, his administration could potentially throw thousands of homeless people into concentration camps like those used to detain migrant workers and their children who are seeking refuge from violence and poverty across the border. Setting a precedent, these law-and-order tactics could be used against countless other sections of workers: those who suffer from mental illness and drug addiction; the intellectually disabled and physically handicapped; striking workers; workers who protest against attacks on democratic rights and war.

These diseased ramblings are not simply the product of the mind of Donald Trump. They are an expression of the political crisis of a ruling class moving far to the right, under conditions of such extreme levels of inequality that the contradictions cannot be resolved through any other means but militarism and massive repression on one hand, or social revolution on the other. The ruling class sees the mounting anger of the working class against conditions of inequality as a threat to its rule that must be put down at any cost.

It is up to the working class to intervene with its own political program if it is ever to free itself from the crisis of capitalism, pushing all sections of the working class further into desperation and threatening more with homelessness as a small layer of the ultra-rich hoards all of society’s wealth. In order to expropriate the wealth which it creates with its labor, the working class needs to fight under the banner of its own independent, socialist program. To do this requires that workers break with the Democratic Party, the trade unions, and all other representatives of the capitalist class, and form a leadership capable of fighting for their own interests, which include the right to affordable, safe housing and high-paying jobs for all workers.



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