

Democrats enforce crackdown on vehicular homelessness in Los Angeles

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On July 30 the Los Angeles City Council restored regulations that had expired at the beginning of the month preventing people from sleeping at night in vehicles on residential streets or living in vehicles within a block of parks, schools, preschools or daycares.

At last count, over 9,500 people live in vehicles throughout the city, and a total of 16,528 in all of Los Angeles County. In Los Angeles, a program of safe parking sites in private lots has room for less than 200 vehicles. Violators of the ordinance are ticketed \$25 for the first offence, \$50 for the second and \$75 for each offense after that.

According to press reports, as the Democratic Party-controlled City Council voted 13-0 in favor of the measure, those present began chanting “Shame on You!”

Opponents of the prohibition point out that there are few options for the homeless. Similar prohibitions apply in the cities that surround Los Angeles. Last month the City of Long Beach announced a plan to give 30-day parking permits in selected areas to families living in their cars, which the city estimates at 85, out of Long Beach’s estimated homeless population of 1,900 persons.

In signing the measure, which is to last until September, Los Angeles’ Democratic mayor Eric Garcetti justified his approval of the measure on the grounds of balancing the needs of the homeless with community complaints of lack of parking and bad sanitation, a time-worn practice of dividing workers and pitting the homeless against their surrounding neighbors. Garcetti cynically promised to provide another 200 “safe-parking spots” this year.

The “safe-parking” initiative, along with many other measures, including giving bus tickets to the homeless

to leave town—known cynically as “Greyhound therapy,” a tactic being aggressively pursued by San Francisco and San Diego—and the housing of 21,631 persons last year, have not kept up with the explosion of homelessness in Los Angeles County.

The latest count by the LA Homeless Services Authority reported 58,936 homeless individuals in Los Angeles County, a 12 percent increase from 2018. In the city proper the count is 36,165, 16 percent higher than in 2018. Of those, 27,221 are “unsheltered” (44,214 in the county), a category that includes those forced to live in their vehicles.

In fact, with the exception of a negligible drop in homeless military veterans (from 3,886 to 3,878), the increase impacts every category. Chronically homeless people increased 17 percent since 2018; youth homelessness exploded by 24 percent; senior homelessness jumped 8 percent.

While shelter capacity and homes for the homeless have been built, the growth in the homeless population is being fed by an increase in the number of evictions across the state, a product of the ever-rising cost of rents that far exceeds increases in real wages for most Angelinos.

In Los Angeles, one-third of households spend more than half of their income on housing costs; 721,000 of them are even more “severely rent-burdened.” According to the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, a person with an hourly wage of \$13.25 in Los Angeles would have to work 79 hours a week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment. Los Angeles needs more than half a million “housing units” to meet the needs of low-income renters.

For apartment units built before October 1978, there is a limited rent-control law which caps yearly rent increases to between 3 and 8 percent. A family that has

continuously occupied such an apartment since 1985 would now be paying four times as much as when they moved in.

Under the terms of this labyrinthine law, landlords can raise rents above the rent-controlled percentage for a number of reasons, such as another tenant joining the household. Once tenants move out or are evicted the rent increases to whatever the market will bear, a clause that serves as an incentive for landlords to rid themselves of tenants that face financial uncertainties.

Rent control ended for apartments built after October 1978 on the pretext that rent control lowers the supply of affordable housing in the long-run.

While over 5,000 units have been built in the last year to house the homeless, another 100,000 are planned over the next decade.

Yet, Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin estimates that 110,000 units in Los Angeles currently sit empty; Bonin is proposing a “vacancy tax” such as the one recently passed in the city of Oakland, California. The actual number may even be higher. Housing investigators Walter Dominguez and Brad Kane of the Pico Neighborhood Council found that in many high-rise buildings in trendy West Los Angeles, where monthly rents start at around \$3,000 for a studio apartment, 40 to 50 percent of the units are unoccupied.

It is more and more the case that investment firms, such as the Blackstone Group in Sacramento, where renters were recently hit with a 50 percent rent hike, or Taylor Equities in Los Angeles, are buying up apartments and homes in bulk across the state, creating monopolies that manipulate rents at will by controlling the supply of homes.

According to housing advocates, the state as a whole has a 300,000 surplus of above moderate-income rental housing. Investment is also flowing to the building of luxury housing instead of less profitable affordable units.

In the current electoral season, it has become fashionable for politicians, Democrats and Republicans, to call for the break-up of monopolies; this is done with a wink and a nod. No doubt, any palliative measure on homelessness will avoid constraining monopoly profits.

The homeless crisis is a sure indication that the solution of the homeless crisis in Los Angeles and in California requires the breaking up of the housing monopolies, the takeover of vacant apartments and

homes and their distribution according to need, at affordable prices. Such a mobilization will not be carried out by the Democratic Party, which represents Wall Street and the big banks; it requires the mass mobilization of workers, independently of capitalist politicians, and the socialist transformation of society, to place human needs ahead of corporate profits.



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