

Trump administration and California Democrats conspire to place the homeless in internment camps

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On Tuesday, September 9, representatives from the Trump administration's Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Justice met with officials from the office of Los Angeles' Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti to discuss how to rid the city of the homeless, particularly those who live in tents in the vicinity of City Hall, so-called "Skid Row" and in wealthier Los Angeles neighborhoods.

About 5,000 people pitch tents in downtown Los Angeles every night; thousands more live and sleep on the trendy sidewalks of Hollywood and West Los Angeles. Many others occupy tent cities along the Los Angeles rivers and freeways.

Although the talks between the federal government and Los Angeles officials have been described as "fluid," what is being discussed is the razing of urban tent camps and the housing of homeless families and individuals in "government facilities," a euphemism for internment camps, such as those used for Japanese families in World War II and, currently, for immigrant families seeking asylum.

Despite Republican President Donald Trump's ostensible enmity for California Democrats, there was no indication in press reports that their tour and conversations were anything less than cordial, with LA officials eager for the White House to take the homeless off their hands.

In an interview in July with Fox News' Tucker Carlson, Trump denounced conditions in San Francisco: "We may do something to get that whole thing cleaned up. It's inappropriate," he declared. "Now, we have to take the people and do something. We have to do something."

Far from seeing homelessness as a humanitarian

crisis, the issue for Trump is that tourists and businesspeople "can't be looking at that."

Across California and the United States, the homeless have been dehumanized and demonized, seen as a problem to get rid of, rather than as human beings marginalized by the social and economic inequality produced by the failure of the capitalist system.

This became evident on July 30 when the Democratic Party-controlled City Council stiffened regulations barring people from living in their vehicles in residential areas and in the vicinity of schools, preschools and day cares—strongly implying that the homeless represent a threat to children. According to a press report, as the Council voted 13-0 in favor of the measure, those present began chanting "Shame on You!"

This week Trump administration officials were given a tour of the \$4.5 million "Flyaway Homes" housing initiative—consisting of "homes" constructed from stacks of shipping containers—as well as the dilapidated Jordan Downs public housing project in the Watts neighborhood.

Originally built during World War II to house factory workers, Jordan Downs was converted to low-income housing in the 1950s. Now, after decades of neglect, Garcetti's administration plans to add another 115 units, and transform the project into an "urban village," in the mayor's words. The city also allegedly plans to expand, by just 200 slots, public parking for homeless people's vehicles.

These minimal efforts, cynically touted by government officials to their out-of-town visitors, have failed to keep up with the rise in homelessness in Los Angeles and across California.

The latest count by the LA Homeless Services Authority reported 58,936 homeless individuals in Los Angeles County, a 35 percent increase from 2017. The count is 36,165 in the city proper, 45 percent higher than in 2017.

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. One in four of the US homeless (some 600,000 individuals) live in California; one in ten reside in Los Angeles County.

The *Washington Post* reported that the president had signed an executive order in June creating “a new White House council on eliminating ‘regulatory barriers’” to ensure profits for builders building new housing, who complain that real estate companies “drive up prices on housing and limit supply.”

In fact, there is no supply problem. Alongside the increase of homelessness in California, more than 8 percent of homes in the state remain vacant, including 140,000 units in the San Francisco Bay Area and at least 110,000 in Los Angeles. The number of empty homes and apartments in the entire state could house the United States’ entire homeless population. Linked to that generous oversupply is an aggressive policy across the state of rapidly evicting homeless families who occupy vacant homes.

The market is controlled in the interest of real estate monopolies. This is nothing new; in 2009, in the midst of the Great Recession, hundreds of thousands watched in dismay a video that documented the destruction of newly built homes in order to ensure the profits of builders and banks.

Any measures taken by the Trump administration would protect profits for the real estate oligarchs in California and elsewhere. Governor Gavin Newsome and state Democrats do not have any fundamental disagreement with the billionaire resident of the White House. Last week the state legislature passed a law guaranteeing real estate monopolies yearly rent increases of 5 percent plus the rate of inflation, a measure that assures that the real rents will double every 14 years in price-adjusted dollars.

No such guarantee is proposed by the Governor for workers’ wages to keep up with rising costs. In Los

Angeles half of all homes are rentals, disproportionately burdening working-class and young families; one third of families spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing costs; and 721,000 are rent-burdened and one crisis, such as a layoff or a health emergency, from eviction and homelessness.



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