

Federal judge orders Los Angeles to remove all homeless people from Skid Row

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Federal Judge David O. Carter issued a ruling on Tuesday ordering the city and county of Los Angeles to carry out the removal of all homeless people from downtown's Skid Row neighborhood by October.

Skid Row, infamous for hosting one of the largest concentrations of homeless people in the United States, is plagued by all the attendant miseries that come with living on the streets. Those in the area report rampant drug abuse, and sanitation has been so poor as to see the reemergence of diseases like Typhus.

Official surveys have largely been suspended since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic last year, but it is certain that under such conditions the virus has ripped through the homeless population. There are just short of 5,000 homeless people living in Skid Row, with about half of them unable to find any form of shelter and sleeping outdoors on any given night.

The order comes on the heels of the forced eviction of the homeless encampment in Los Angeles' Echo Park at the end of March. Echo Park, previously home to several hundred people was cleared out overnight. When enforcing the eviction, the Los Angeles Police Department arrested journalists and National Lawyers Guild observers and beat protesters, breaking several people's bones.

As for the homeless themselves, the city's answer has been to place them in temporary shelters, taking advantage of some programs made available during the pandemic. However, such relocations are always temporary.

The experience of all efforts to alleviate the homeless crisis in the last decade has followed roughly the same formula.

The homeless population concentrated in a given area—usually a wealthy one or one that could otherwise be prime real estate—are rounded up and taken to

remote shelters. In the process, any sort of community that would have been built up is torn apart as people are taken to different centers. Then, after a time, when whatever funds were made available dry up, or voucher programs expire, a portion of them find themselves on the streets again, only in a new area, typically a much poorer one, where they will be less of a burden on property values. This was the case with the removal of the homeless encampment in Anaheim several years ago, and more or less the same could be expected today.

Whatever number of people manage to find some stability afterwards—acquiring and maintaining a steady income, securing whatever healthcare they might need, and so on—are offset by those newly homeless people who have not been able to afford shelter, who have been evicted, or otherwise.

A new twist being promoted today is the creation of “Tiny Homes Villages,” which are essentially city sponsored Hoovervilles. In North Hollywood's Alexandria Park, the city has opened a small village of ultra-tiny homes, each of which is a single room of about 50 square feet.

The clearance of Skid Row by October will necessarily mean a major police crackdown in the area. The neighborhood has a homeless population an order of magnitude greater than that which until recently existed in Echo Park. The police operations will be correspondingly greater.

While the media and parts of the Democratic Party have hailed the ruling as a legal mandate to meaningfully address the crisis, the suit was brought against the city by the “LA Alliance for Human Rights.” That organization—one would not guess from the name—is an alliance of landlords and business owners who are concerned about how the homeless

crisis is impacting commerce and property values. The have themselves extolled the clearing of Echo Park, and have pointed to it as a model for further “cleanups.”

Home to Hollywood and Beverly Hills, the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area is, after New York City’s, the wealthiest in the country. California, moreover, is the wealthiest state in the nation, and yet it is consistently the epicenter of America’s homeless crisis. The presence of massive wealth by itself is clearly insufficient to preclude homelessness. In fact, the piling up such unprecedented fortunes in a few hands necessitates the immiseration of a significant section of the population.

The reality is that any progressive resolution to the homeless crisis is impossible without the implementation of a massive social program, replete with billions being put into public relief funds, or without dealing with the high cost of living in the city and the state. In other words, the homeless crisis cannot be solved in any real sense without reckoning with capitalism, the social and economic system that created it, and expropriating the wealth of the ruling elite.



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