California Governor Newsom enforces Los Angeles homeless encampments sweeps

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9 August 2024

California Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom has commenced a broad sweep throughout Los Angeles County to uproot the homeless following his executive order issued on July 25 "to move urgently to address dangerous homeless encampments."

In California alone, a state with a gross domestic product of $3.23 trillion, more than 181,000 people experience homelessness daily, as reported by the National Alliance to End Homelessness. In Los Angeles alone, more than 75,000 people are homeless, 70 percent of whom are unsheltered.

According to the 2024 State of the Homeless report recently published by the University of California San Francisco (UCSF), California is home to 12 percent of the nation's population, 30 percent of the nation's homeless population, and half the nation's unsheltered population.

Clearly connecting homelessness with skyrocketing living costs, the report notes that nine out of ten participants lost their last housing in California, while 82 percent reported a period in their life where they experienced a serious mental health condition. Moreover, the most common reason for leaving last housing was economic for leaseholders (loss of income) and social for non-leaseholders (social and health crises).

A media blitz has accompanied Newsom's brutal law-and-order actions, publishing images and footage of the Governor as he participated in the dismantlement of tents and piling up abandoned possessions. Arrogantly, Newsom bragged that "People are done. If we don't deal with this, we don't deserve to be in office."

He's speaking on behalf of an upper middle class that finds homelessness an inconvenience to their living standards. The sight of homeless people for this layer conflicts with dining at fancy restaurants and pricey yoga classes. The truth is, none of the Democrats or Republicans deserve to be in office, as they are solely responsible for the policies that have produced a social catastrophe resulting in tens of thousands being thrown on the streets.

In light of this tragic balance sheet, to further deflect responsibility, Newsom upped his reactionary tone by threatening to penalize counties that don't reduce homelessness as he prepares to take state money away from social programs, therefore transferring the burden to local and municipal administrations, whose leaders have supinely supported his sweeping attack on the homeless.

Newsom is a full supporter of the criminal war policies of the Biden administration. He pledged his support to Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, current vice president and former California Attorney General, who has promised to continue the policies of warmongering and genocide that have produced an explosion of opposition among the working class and youth.

The message is clear: the state has no intention to resolve a serious social problem like homelessness because money must be directed to the defense of the interests of the ruling class and, importantly, the preservation of the profit system that has created the most severe levels of social inequality since the 1930s, despite unprecedented wealth produced by workers.

Significant funds have been allocated for a capitalist solution of homelessness, i.e., the removal of its appearance from public eye. Newsom has directed more than $24 billion during his administration to clean up encampments, move the homeless off the streets and sidewalks, and convert hotels and motels into temporary shelters. These measures, however, are nothing but an aspirin to a cancer patient, as they do not address the root cause of social inequality, the capitalist system.

A 6-3 Supreme Court ruling on June 28, *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson*, has cleared the way for governors and local administrations to dismantle and ban encampments. The far-right decision cynically declared that bans on outdoor sleeping do not violate the Eighth

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Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.

The ruling was warmly welcomed by Newsom, who wasted no time to criminalize the victims of the policies dictated by the two big business parties. Turning homelessness into a security concern, he welcomed the decision as it gives administrations the authority to clear "unsafe encampments" and stated that "This decision removes the legal ambiguities that have tied the hands of local officials for years."

So glaring is the right-wing attack on the homeless by the hand of California Democrats that some of their officials jumped into damage control mode. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass had the audacity to try to distance herself from Newsom's measure, stating that "strategies that just move people along from one neighborhood to the next or give citations instead of housing do not work."

Last March, Bass and Newsom forged "a new partnership to help keep areas near freeways clean and safe as both the State and the City continue their efforts to bring unhoused people indoors." Joining the mayor's vist to Sacramento were two of the three members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) on the City Council.

On that occasion, Bass thanked "Governor Newsom for locking arms with us to deliver for the people of Los Angeles." To which, Newsom added: "This agreement between the City of Los Angeles and the state underscores our shared commitment to addressing encampments and ensuring clean and safe public spaces for all Californians." We now know what they meant.

Bass is only concerned that the burden will now be shifted onto municipalities, having no solution for a problem that in the last five pandemic years has significantly changed the physiognomy of the city's population. Multiple police crackdowns on the homeless have taken place under Bass's administration, in addition to a number of City Council measures implemented to selectively prohibit encampments.

Moreover, while Bass provided increased funds for the police (an additional $138 million), last April she announced a drastic cut to her already inadequate "Inside Safe" homelessness program, reducing funds from $250 million to $185 million. These are the actions that garner the support of the DSA, who have backed up Bass and her City Council from the get-go.

Nor is California the only state to have adopted the Supreme Court ruling's ruthless approach. The attack on the homeless population is a nationwide effort spearheaded by Democrats. In Oregon, another state controlled by the Democrats, where the case originated that led to the Supreme Court ruling, the Grants Pass City Council unanimously voted last Wednesday to ban camping on public property and create a designated area where the homeless will be confined.

Last October, New York Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul supported New York City's legal action to suspend efforts that provide emergency housing to homeless people. In recent months, a large influx of migrants was blamed for the failure of the city's utterly inadequate shelter system.

This was the occasion for anti-immigrant and xenophobic attacks on an already vulnerable population. Hochul herself made clear that no one is welcome unless they bring money to Wall Street, stating: "I don't know how the right to shelter… can or should be interpreted to be an open invitation to 8 billion people who live on this planet, that if you show up in the streets of New York, that the city of New York has an obligation to provide you with a hotel room or shelter."

A measure of Hochul's utter failure in addressing homelessness was given by her own Safe Options Support Program, according to which a measly 450 individuals received some sort of long-term or permanent housing in the last two years. This in a city with more than 100,000 homeless people, one in 83 New Yorkers.

Homelessness, like every social problem confronting the working class, can only be addressed by dismantling not encampments, but the entire scaffolding of the profit system that provides unlimited funds to the most horrific wars abroad and attacks on democratic rights and living standards at home, while facilitating increasing social polarization. Only a socialist society, which guarantees civilized living standards for everyone, can address such issues by prioritizing human needs, not profit.

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