

Growing number of homeless migrants forced to sleep in the open in New York

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In an indictment of the Democratic administration of Mayor Eric Adams, New York City is seeing an increasing number of migrants, including asylum seekers, who are forced to sleep in the open. Having crossed the southern border into the United States, these refugees are living in tents, on flattened cardboard boxes, in subway cars or on the sidewalk.

Some have been doing so for as long as five months. This is in addition to thousands of American-born workers who are sleeping on the streets and nearly 150,000 native-born people and migrants who use the city shelter system.

An article last week in the *New York Times* highlighted the plight of these workers, many from South America and West Africa, who in many cases were bused to New York City by the far-right governor of Texas, Greg Abbott. Providing an indication of the scope of the crisis, the *Times* reports that “roughly 800 migrants entered the city’s shelter system last week, down from 1,200 migrants the week before the Biden policy went into effect, and significantly lower than the city’s one-week peak of 4,300 in May 2023.”

The *Times* is referring to the executive order of early June, in which President Joe Biden suspended asylum applications at the US/Mexico border whenever the number of “unauthorized crossings” reaches 2,500. Biden’s order violates United States law and international law by effectively abolishing the right to asylum. His crackdown has reduced the number of people crossing the southern border to a three-year low.

The shameful and needless deprivation the migrants are facing is the direct responsibility of the Democratic Party, which controls the Federal, state and city governments. Seeking bipartisan support for their agenda of war against Russia and genocide in Gaza, the Democrats have adopted the anti-immigrant policies of the increasingly fascistic Republican Party.

On Randall’s Island, a largely recreational area in New York’s East River, migrants set up a tent encampment every night. They pool their money to buy food, which they share. With no other options, the migrants use fountains for drinking water, walk to public restrooms and bathe in the open.

Influenced by both parties’ vile anti-immigrant rhetoric, passersby sometimes taunt the migrants and accuse them of invading the park. In the morning, the migrants rush to take

down the tents before park security forces arrive. Instead of offering shelter, the city repeatedly tries to tear down the encampments.

“We’re here, awaiting what comes, because where are we going to run to?” Guillermo Contreras told the local publication *The City*. “We don’t have anywhere else to go.” The young man from Colombia has been living in the encampment for three months. Migrants report being unable to find jobs or rent apartments.

During the most recent rains, the migrants’ clothes, shoes, belongings, food and tents were soaked. “You have to sleep wet and wait for the next morning to be able to dry your clothing,” Rafael Enrique Fernandez, a migrant from Venezuela, told *The City*.

Not far from the encampment on Randall’s Island is a shelter that houses more than 3,000 migrants. This shelter, one of the city’s biggest, is itself comprised of a group of tents that are each the size of a football field.

Fights and petty theft are common in the crowded shelter. Worse, three migrants have been killed there this year. The shelter is also subject to police raids, including one earlier this month, after which the New York Police Department admitted that it had found no weapons or drugs. Residents were forced to stand outside in the sweltering heat as cops pawed through their possessions.

Some migrants have left this and other shelters because they feel safer sleeping in the open. But many others were kicked out after the city limited stays in the shelters to 30 or 60 days.

New York City, unlike most American cities, has a right-to-shelter law. But the Adams administration has done its level best to erode the law, since, so far, it has not been able to abolish it completely. The length of stay restrictions, which were enacted in May, are intended to force migrants out of shelters and reduce costs to the city.

Extensions of the time limit are being granted to migrants who have applied for asylum or temporary protective status, but they must prove that they have submitted applications. Many migrants’ immigration papers are lost or stolen, which prevents them from applying for asylum. Others are unable to get appointments to fill out applications and are then evicted.

The city government is openly hostile to the migrants. When

asked at a press conference about the encampments outside migrant shelters, Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom said:

That's not OK. We're not trying to be heavy-handed, but if you've had your time, you've had your case management, and you have to leave, you have to really move on.

Adams, a former police officer, has made hateful remarks worthy of former president Donald Trump. "Let me tell you something, New Yorkers, never in my life have I had a problem that I did not see an ending to—I don't see an ending to this," said Adams, referring to migrants, at a public gathering last September. "This issue will destroy New York City."

Adams has also shamelessly promoted anti-immigrant stereotypes during his weekly news conferences. "How do we have a large body of people that are in our city and country that are excellent swimmers, and at the same time we need lifeguards?" he asked in May. One wonders why Adams did not simply call immigrants "wetbacks."

Viciousness and cruelty toward migrants and the homeless are now a part of Democratic Party policy nationwide. Governor Gavin Newsom of California, a Democrat, recently had himself filmed as he dismantled homeless encampments, thereby enforcing his own executive order.

In New York state, Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul has used changes to state mental health guidelines dating from April, 2022 to criminalize the homeless. Police officers are now allowed to commit homeless people they regard as mentally ill to hospital facilities. Previously, as is still the case in many states, only a qualified health care provider or a family member could take such action.

Adams implemented this policy as soon as he could and has bragged that he has a list of nearly a hundred individuals who may be subject to police action. The city's mental health care system is overburdened, particularly since the advent of the COVID pandemic in 2020.

The WSWS noted in regard to Newsom that the California Democrat was "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 same can be said of Adams.

The NYC mayor seeks to make the city safe and attractive to the thousands of High-Net Worth Individuals (those with assets, excluding real estate, of over \$1 million) who inhabit the city. New York City is also home to 101 billionaires, according to *Forbes*. Much of their obscene wealth is made from investments in luxury housing throughout the city.

Compare this to the enormous number of people in the city who applied for Section 8 rent vouchers in June—630,000—for a

mere 20,000 places, or the tens of thousands who double up with friends and family and are not counted in the city's homeless statistics. Thousands more will be unable to afford the four percent increase on rent-stabilized apartments and hundreds of thousands are living in subpar city housing—housing that is gradually being privatized and raised to market rate rentals, which currently run at \$3,500 monthly in the city as a whole, and much more in Manhattan. Millions of New Yorkers are a missed paycheck or a medical bill away from destitution.

The statements of Adams and the treatment of migrant workers and the homeless in general betray more than a whiff of fascism. As WSWS writer Clara Weiss noted on Twitter/X on Sunday, the dehumanization and criminalization of the homeless was an essential feature of Nazi policy. She wrote:

Based on the racist, fascist eugenics policies of the National Socialists, the homeless were classified as "professional criminals" and "asocials." As were the mentally and physically ill, including people suffering from substance abuse.

Liquidating homelessness was one of the election promises of the NSDAP. In 1933, the Nazi regime conducted "beggar raids," arresting thousands & eliminating homeless asylums. The homeless were forcibly sterilized, and then put into prisons or concentration camps.

The aim of top Democrats is to graphically dissociate the party from any policies of social reform, encourage political backwardness and anti-immigrant and racist attitudes, and bloc with fascistic forces against the threat of mass opposition from the working class. In this way, the pseudo-left's alliance with and support for the Democratic Party facilitates the growth of fascism.

The fight led by the Socialist Equality Party and its presidential and vice presidential candidates Joe Kishore and Jerry White for the working class to break with the two parties of the American financial oligarchy is urgent and essential for the defense of all basic democratic and social rights.



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