

Homeless man crushed to death as Atlanta city authorities attempted to clear encampment

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On Thursday, January 16, 49-year-old Cornelius Taylor was killed in Atlanta, Georgia, when the tent he was sleeping in was razed by a front loader.

City crews under the orders of the Democratic city administration were working to clear homeless encampments opposite the Ebenezer Baptist Church ahead of Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations on Monday, January 20. King was a co-pastor at the church from 1960 up until his assassination in 1968.

The city of Atlanta, just like other cities in the United States, has a policy of using brutal sweeps of encampments as a solution to the entrenched and ever-increasing phenomenon of homelessness.

The “cleanup” which killed Taylor was undertaken by the city in order to present a sanitized view of the surroundings of the church, where the annual MLK Day celebrations are held. The area surrounding the church on Auburn Avenue has been an area where a number of homeless have lived for a long time in flimsy tents. No warning was given to these most impoverished persons prior to the clearing operation.

The fact that the city used construction equipment weighing up to 10,000 pounds to clear out the homeless people attests to the utterly callous attitude of the authorities. Despite the entirely insincere empathy Democratic Party officials expressed during news conferences, the latest raid and the killing of Taylor reveals that they consider homeless encampments as trash that has been gotten rid of.

There has been an outpouring of outrage from Taylor’s family and friends, who described him as a person with great optimism and kindness despite his impoverishment. He had just obtained a job and had told his friends and homeless volunteers that he was looking forward to his transition to a new life.

William Franklin, who was at the encampment when the sleeping Taylor was killed by the front loader, described what he witnessed to the local WABE radio. He said, “I was here, and nobody warned anybody. Not even the people who

was [sic] doing the job.”

Sylvia Broome, who works for the homeless outreach non-profit organization Reemerge, told the same radio station that she had known Taylor for several years. She said he had a good heart and liked to draw. Holding back her tears, she said, “He had dreams, ambitions. He had family; he was a good, good friend of mine, and he’s gone.”

Will Johnson, another homeless person who lived in the same encampment as Taylor, was a witness to the brutal scene as well. According to Johnson, the city officials told them, “You got four minutes to get everything you want to take with you.” He continued expressing outrage, “They should have come to each and every one of these tents and opened it up if nobody was responding. I think you should have done more in the safety aspect of it. The way you did this—it wasn’t right. There was no order.”

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens issued a usual perfunctory statement saying, “I care deeply about each and every life in this city.”

On January 24 last year Dickens signed an executive order with great pomp and ceremony announcing an allocation of \$4.6 million to various city departments purportedly to “expand shelter services, warming center operations, and additional shelter sites and provide the wrap-around services.”

Additionally, the city allocated \$2.4 million to an organization called Partners for HOME (Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone) supposedly to “address the situations that we’re having with unhoused individuals under underpasses and underneath some of our bridges.”

This was in reference to a massive fire that broke out in March 2017 which collapsed a huge section of the interstate highway I-85. Although the fire started at a nearby state-owned storage facility containing highly flammable, high-density polyurethane and fiberglass tubing, the state authorities blamed three homeless persons for “maliciously” causing the fire.

Despite the state charging them with draconian criminal charges, the three were set free with one of them agreeing to complete an 18-month “mental health and sobriety program.” This legal outcome was the result of the authorities having presented no proof that these homeless persons were to blame for this inferno.

Dickens told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that he has ordered city crews to begin clearing out homeless encampments under bridges soon. He claimed that such encampments pose a danger, as they supposedly did back in 2017.

The mayor in 2023 announced a new “rapid housing” project near Atlanta City Hall. These housing units were created by “transforming” 40 shipping containers into housing units. This was both to “save costs,” according to the mayor’s words, and also to provide “flexibility” to the authorities to move them out of sight when necessary. So inadequate were these housing units that the homeless, who were either persuaded or forced to move into them, returned to living on the street.

This was acknowledged by the CEO of Partners of HOME. “There are solutions that are being created that are temporary, that are congregate in nature, where people have to live in dormitory-style environments with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities, and many folks don’t want to live like that.”

In contrast to the pittance in aid for the homeless, Dickens has backed the construction of the \$90 million “Cop City” training center and spearheaded a crackdown on protests against the facility. Police killed Manuel “Tortugita” Esteban Paez Terán during a raid on a Stop Cop City protest encampment in 2023.

The brutal killing of Taylor is not the first instance when the homeless have been treated with utter savagery in the United States. Numerous persons living on the streets have been shot dead by police and even by vigilantes, over the past decades. In 2014, 37-year-old Kelly Thomas, a homeless person suffering from schizophrenia, was beaten to death by six police officers in Orange County, California.

There is no national tracking system, but according to an estimate by Homeless Deaths Count, at least 20 Americans die every day while experiencing homelessness.

The growing crackdown on the homeless across the country is a result of the US Supreme Court issuing an utterly barbaric ruling in *Grants Pass v. Johnson* that singled out homeless people for humiliating punishment and criminal charges. The 6-3 ruling issued in June 2024 overrode the ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 2018 declared that cities and towns banning the homeless from sleeping on the streets and camping in public places was unconstitutional. The reactionary Supreme Court

by its ruling provided the necessary green light to municipalities to criminalize homelessness. Since then, over 100 cities, towns and counties have essentially outlawed homelessness by imposing fines, punishments and prison terms.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported in December 2024, the number of homeless doubled under the Biden administration. While the Democrats found unlimited funding for waging war against Russia and facilitating Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, there was no systematic effort to ease widespread poverty and homelessness. As the WSWS observed, the number of homeless, numbering over 770,000 by the end of last year, exceeds the population of cities such as Atlanta, Seattle, Boston or Detroit.

Under the incoming Trump administration, which is an outright oligarchic kleptocracy, this problem will skyrocket, as the new government will slash even the meager funds currently allocated to the struggling working class and the poor. Under the newly created Orwellian Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which has been handed over to the fascist billionaire Elon Musk, the Trump administration has announced plans to slash \$2 trillion in social spending.

The attitude of the Trump oligarchy to homelessness was glaringly displayed by Musk himself. In an interview with Trump confidant Tucker Carlson published last October, Musk declared, “Homeless is a misnomer. It implies that someone got a little bit behind on their mortgage, and if you just gave them a job, they would be back on their feet. ... What you actually have are violent drug zombies with dead eyes, and needles and human feces on the street.”



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