

Homeless cleared from Anaheim, California encampment remain in limbo

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31 March 2018

Last month, when approximately 700 homeless people were cleared out of a tent city along the Santa Ana riverbed in Anaheim, California, they were given temporary motel vouchers until they could be permanently relocated in neighboring cities. At the time, the plan was to eventually move everyone to new, smaller encampments in the nearby cities of Irvine, Huntington Beach and Laguna Niguel.

However, a meeting on Tuesday of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, who are responsible for the county's homeless initiative, saw protest from about 1,000 Irvine residents, and ultimately voted to terminate the plan. The board will meet with the federal judge who initially ordered the county to address the homeless situation next Tuesday.

While the long-term future of the Anaheim homeless is still uncertain, the about-face from the county will strand them for the immediate term. As motel vouchers expire, they will find themselves on the streets again, with no hint how to prepare for what comes next. If the discussions with the judge drag on, then they may be left in limbo for much longer. Pets were impounded during the initial sweep last month, with the assurance that they could be held for 90 days. If a resolution isn't reached within that time, and if anyone is unable to pick their pet up until then, then those animals may be euthanized.

Even if a plan is agreed upon quickly, there is every indication that there will be no substantial improvements for the well-being of the homeless. In fact, the "homeless shelters" to be constructed, as they're referred to in the plan, have been described as "essentially large tents." Moreover, some of the proposed locations are unfit for human habitation, including one site in Irvine that was previously used for chemical production.

But perhaps the biggest indictment of the plan is that it is put forward by the same politicians that presided over conditions that led to the explosion of homelessness and the development of tent cities in the first place.

The mayors of Orange County cities spoke during the meeting on Tuesday. In their comments, the main concern among them appeared to be the question of who would host the homeless. Naturally, each claimed that their city was contributing amply to alleviate their condition of the homeless and tried to shift the responsibility to their neighbors or to the state legislature and Governor Jerry Brown. The question of addressing homelessness as a social phenomenon in itself was avoided, with the issue instead approached as a game of hot potato, and the continued existence of a large homeless population taken as a given.

In a public comment section which saw testimony from protesters and homeless advocates, one advocate aptly condemned the county: "Rather than taking the time to develop a well-reasoned plan to house and assist the homeless population, the supervisors have cooked up a half-baked idea to move them, like animals."

Even among the protesters present on Tuesday there appeared to be real concern for the fate of the homeless. Some speakers simply didn't want homeless in their cities, but others sympathized with the homeless, and objected to the conditions that they face. Some said that the homeless didn't need relocation, but solutions. Others spoke to the high rent in the area, or access to health services. Much was also said about how some \$200 million that was earmarked for mental health issues went unused by the county as revealed in a recent state audit.

The treatment of the homeless in Anaheim can be

looked at as a microcosm of the treatment of the working class as a whole. The callousness shown in dealing with the lives of homeless people is not limited to Orange County, nor is it limited to the homeless. The immediate causes of homelessness in Southern California—high rent, low and stagnating wages, an ever-increasing cost of living, and so on—are problems confronting workers across the US and internationally. The Department of Housing and Urban Development found at the end of last year that homelessness had increased in the US for the first time since 2009.

More generally, the ruling class has targeted the gains made by the working class over decades of struggle for cuts. The mayor of Anaheim, Tom Tait, gave PBS the excuse that there is simply no money to address the social crisis: “So we could help a few families here and there, but to help the thousands that we’re talking about, tens of thousands, I don’t see where—there’s nowhere near that kind of funding.”

As is the case for the establishment’s excuses nationally, while claiming that there is no money for social programs, plenty has been found to funnel to the ruling class. In Anaheim, Disneyland has received a significant 30-year tax exemption for the renovation of nearby streets. Such a defense is by now quite familiar to workers around the world, who have heard the same tired lines from governors, presidents, prime ministers, and chancellors.



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